

THE UNAPOLOGETIC LIFE OF JULIA ESQUIVEL

*Lo que no nos deja descansar
no es el ruido de la calle,
no son los gritos de la multitud,
no es el barullo de la guerra,
hacia las montañas.*

*Lo que no nos deja descansar
lo que no deja descansar
lo que no deja de golpear
aquí dentro.
es el llanto silencioso
de las indias
clavada en la memoria
que durante la guerra
velaron en los campos
en los campos
en los campos.*

*¡Si los fueran a matar
en los campos.*

*ed us with Resurrection
live than ever before.
transform our agonies
ize our struggle.
is up when we fall.
se they loom like giants
the crazed gorillas' fear.
with Resurrection.
life (poor things!).
that is the whirlwind
not let us sleep.
keep watch.
dream.
wises.
Pauli."
ll park.
gle
the quetzal
Trecan.
come
world
in a place.*



Sustaining the movement.



“I have admired Sojourners’ courage and commitment over the years for its honest prophetic witness to the church and the world—commitment to the gospel and truth. The Spirit is at work in the world and Sojourners has given all of us great hope in what God is doing in our time of history. This is the good news that I want to support.”

—DENNIS DAVIS, Sustainers Circle
member since 2003

Join our Sustainers Circle of monthly donors today. You’ll receive a complimentary subscription to *Sojourners* magazine for yourself or for a friend or family member. It’s easy to get started online at **sojo.net/monthly**, or call **1-800-714-7474** and ask for donor relations. Thank you for supporting Sojourners’ mission to articulate the biblical call to social justice!

SOJOURNERS

**"WE THINK WE ARE SEARCHING GOOGLE,
BUT IT IS ACTUALLY SEARCHING
AND MINING US."**

**Every Breath
You Take**

Surveillance is everywhere, and its uses aren't always benign. People in Detroit are fighting back.

by Bill Wylie-
Kellermann



28

22

"They Have Threatened Us with Resurrection" The revolutionary witness of poet Julia Esquivel.

by Emilie
Teresa Smith

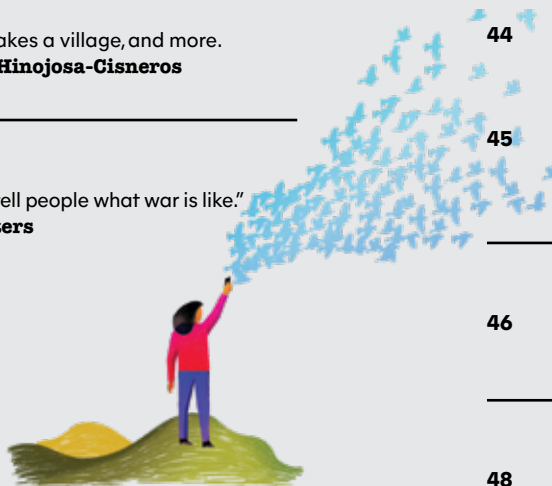
34

The Twisted Roots of Hate What do anti-Semitism and anti-immigrant sentiments have in common? Plenty.

by Joyce
Dubensky

Voices

6	Spotlight
9	Mobilizing Hope Time in the desert. by Adam Russell Taylor
	Commentary
12	Waging Peace The Afghanistan Papers challenge the cult of endless war. by David Cortright
14	Lent A season to experiment with overturning the power of death. by Julie Polter
15	Democracy Political corruption deserves more than apathy from Christians. by Conor M. Kelly
	Columns
16	The Hungry Spirit The gospel according to a TikTok evangelist. by Rose Marie Berger
18	Under the Sun Why fasting is not just between me and God. by Jeania Ree V. Moore
19	Soul Work Health care takes a village, and more. by Carolina Hinojosa-Cisneros
	Eyewitness
20	"You have to tell people what war is like." by David Peters



Sojourners magazine (ISSN 0364-2097) is published monthly, except September-October is combined, at 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. Periodicals Postage Paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Canadian Publications Sales Agreement #257494. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sojourners, PO Box 48, Congers, NY 10920-9856.

16



39

Vision

	Culture
39	Documentary True solidarity is always costly, says Larycia Hawkins in <i>Same God</i> . by Elan Young
41	On Screen Wealth and colonialism in Bong Joon-ho's <i>Parasite</i> . by Chris Karnadi
42	Eyes & Ears Is it time to delete your church's Facebook page? by Danny Duncan Collum
	Reviews
43	Books <i>Activist Theology</i> asks the right "what-ifs." by Jera Brown
44	Theater "Fairview" cracks African American theatrical tropes. by Stephanie Sandberg
45	An excerpt from <i>A Black Women's History of the United States</i> . by Daina Ramey Berry and Kali Nicole Gross
	Poetry
46	As if a gun were not a war in small. by Kim Stafford
	Living the Word
48	Try repenting more often. by Reta Halteman Finger
	H'rumphs
50	There are no ancient grains in Girl Scout cookies. by Ed Spivey Jr.



Leadership for Wonder Leadership for Witness

A new kind of **Doctor of Ministry**
for a new kind of **Leader**



AUSTIN PRESBYTERIAN
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

AustinSeminary.edu/DMin



Offering a century-long
commitment to hospitality
in a setting designed for
the retreat experience!



Adelynrood

Retreat & Conference Center

A Ministry of the Society of the Companions of the Holy Cross

www.Adelynrood.org

46 Elm Street, Byfield, MA 01922
978-462-6721



From the Editor

Political scientist Gene Sharp, in his seminal trilogy *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, listed 198 methods of nonviolence, from protest and persuasion to noncooperation and nonviolent intervention. The people we profile in *Sojourners*, and the stories we highlight, often exemplify these various methods, and this issue is no exception. Guatemalan poet, theologian, and peace activist Julia Esquivel used the power of transformative words to confront, demystify, and, in ways often impossible to see until years later, weaken her country's dictatorial regime and by extension other autocratic rulers.

The decades-long nightmare Esquivel confronted in Guatemala, says Emilie Teresa Smith in her cover feature, still resonates today. The so-called civil war, more accurately a near-genocidal slaughter by government forces and death squads, raged from the 1960s to 1996; hundreds of thousands of people, many of them Indigenous, were killed and more than 1 million displaced from their homes. Many of those fleeing state violence in Guatemala and elsewhere end up as immigrants to the United States—and face ongoing persecution here. As Joyce Dubensky explains, the same extremist elements that attack immigrants are at the heart of a resurgence of anti-Semitism, in the U.S. and abroad. That resurgence, dire as it seems, cannot match the power, courage, and perseverance of those who, as Esquivel put it, “know how marvelous it is to live threatened with Resurrection!”

RESPONSE

Activist Approved

“Best coverage/introduction to this form of witness I’ve ever read,” said climate activist Jim Antal about Stephen Quirke’s profile of Christians who prayerfully shut down an oil pipeline (“Blueprint for Change?” February 2019). In “Giving a Stranger Your House Key,” Heather Cronk detailed how churches are supporting asylum seekers. “I read articles like this one and am given hope ... that perhaps there is still a chance for people to be good to those different than them,” said Makena Nail. Reader Denise Chang wrote of putting it into practice: “Here in Colorado, we have been working for months ... to sponsor asylum-seekers out of the Aurora Detention Center.”

Write us: response@sojo.net



A mural in a camp for Rohingya refugees expelled from Myanmar / Joel Bergner / Artolution

"PROTEST
BEYOND THE
LAW IS NOT
A DEPARTURE
FROM
DEMOCRACY;;
IT IS
ABSOLUTELY
ESSENTIAL
TO IT."

Howard Zinn

author, *A People's History of the United States*

CONTRIBUTING



Emilie Teresa Smith

Though she was born in Argentina and lives in Canada, Emilie Teresa Smith describes Guatemala as her "heart country" that has "undeniably formed everything about who I am." There, she was deeply impacted by the violence of the Guatemalan genocide as well as "the resurrection, the recovery—witnessing what it meant to not die" (p. 22). A self-described rebel who found her way to Anglican priesthood, Smith now leads her parish with a mindset of "love where we are, love beyond where we are."



Ale De la Torre

"I've loved books since I was very little, and ... I was always surrounded by art," says Mexican illustrator and graphic designer Ale De la Torre. "I was fascinated by the idea of creating my own books and being able to express myself in my own way." Her work is inspired by Mexican biodiversity, Indigenous crafts, and traditions like the Day of the Dead. She sees editorial illustration—such as our cover and related layout (p. 22)—to be where books, art, and design converge.

Jim Wallis President/Editor-in-Chief
Robert Wilson-Black Chief Executive Officer
Adam Russell Taylor Executive Director
Karen L. Lattea Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer
Michael Norman Vice President and Chief Financial Officer
Larisa Friesen Hall Vice President and Chief Advancement Officer

Jim Rice Editor
Ed Spivey Jr. Art Director
Julie Polter Managing Editor
Rose Marie Berger Senior Associate Editor
Betsy Shirley Associate Editor
Da'Shawn Mosley Assistant Editor

Sandi Villarreal Web Editor and Chief Digital Officer
Bob Sabath Director of Web and Digital Technology
Dhanya Addanki Associate Web Editor
Daniel José Camacho Associate Web Editor
Jenna Barnett Associate Web Editor
Christian Smutherman Multimedia Director
Kayla Lattimore Video Producer
Heather Brady Audience Engagement Editor
Lisa Daughtry-Weiss Sr. Dir. of Fdn. Relations, Performance Officer
Sandra Sims Senior Director of Advancement
Cynthia J. Martens Senior Director of Circulation and Production
Kaitlin Levenstrong Director of Major Gifts
Beth Cooper-Chrismon Director of Individual Giving
Rachel Buller Donor Services and Database Manager
Feriel Pietersen Ricks Development Associate, Planned Giving
Rose Urankar Advertising Sales Manager
Sandy Ovalle Director of Campaigns and Mobilizing
Terrance M. McKinley Director of Racial Justice and Mobilizing
Elizabeth Denlinger Reaves Senior Program Director
Melody Zhang Climate Justice Campaign Coordinator
Susanna Bean Digital Mobilizing Coordinator
Brion Thomas Accountant
Krystal Brewer Office Manager
James Simpson Director of the President's Office and Advocacy
J.K. Granberg-Michaelson Assistant to the President
Meredith Brasher Press Secretary to the President
Patrick Hubbard Executive Assistant

FELLOWS **Joey Chin**, Editorial; **Hannah Conklin**, Editorial; **Benjamin Cox**, Administration; **Chelsey J. Johnson**, Donor Services; **Lucas Keller**, Mobilizing; **Christine Lee**, Campaigns; **Julianna Swyers Nikodym**, Circulation; **Miguel A. Petrosky**, Communications; **Candace Sanders**, Multimedia/Online; **Jayne Smith**, Advertising

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Michelle Alexander, Diana Butler Bass, Walter Brueggemann, Joan Chittister, Shane Claiborne, Danny Duncan Collum, Michael Curry, Edwidge Danticat, Marie Dennis, Julian DeShazier, E.J. Dionne Jr., Kelly Brown Douglas, Joshua DuBois, Michael Eric Dyson, Reta Halteman Finger, Kenyatta R. Gilbert, Eddie Glaude, Wes Granberg-Michaelson, David Gushee, Cynthia L. Hale, Lisa Sharon Harper, Jen Hatmaker, Obery Hendricks, Carolina Hinojosa-Cisneros, Barbara A. Holmes, Joel Hunter, Kathy Khang, Grace Ji-Sun Kim, Anne Lamott, James Martin, Bill McKibben, Brian McLaren, Jeania Ree V. Moore, Otis Moss III, Ched Myers, Whitney Parnell, Eboo Patel, Myrna Pérez, Soong-Chan Rah, Richard Rohr, Alexia Salvatierra, Rob Schenck, Najeeba Syeed, Barbara Brown Taylor, Sharon E. Watkins, Cornel West, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, Randy Woodley, Bill Wylie-Kellermann, Jenny Yang, Faith-Marie Zambé

Sojourners Online: sojo.net, **Twitter:** @sojourners
 Get free email updates at sojo.net/email_subscription.

OUR MISSION

The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

BUSINESS AND EDITORIAL ADDRESS

Please send all business and editorial correspondence to Sojourners, 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002.

SUBSCRIPTION AND CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Subscribers: Visit sojo.net/subscribe to manage your subscription or print change of address on a card with old address label attached; send all subscription correspondence and address changes (except countries listed below) to Sojourners, PO Box 48, Congers, NY 10920-9856, call 1-800-678-9691, or email us at sojourners@cambeywest.com (allow six weeks to process any address change). **POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:** Sojourners, PO Box 48, Congers, NY 10920-9856.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

U.S.: \$39.95 one year print (for first-class mail, \$50). Digital subscriptions to Sojourners are available for \$19.95 at sojo.net/subscribe. **Australia:** \$78 one year (via air mail, paid in Australian currency, and sent to MediaCom, PO Box 610, Unley 5061 SA). **New Zealand:** \$97 one year (via air mail, paid in New Zealand currency, and sent to MediaCom, PO Box 9483, Wellington, NZ); email admin@mediacom.org.au. **Canada:** \$49.95 one year (paid in USD). **All other international** (six to eight weeks delivery): \$59.95 one year. **Air service overseas** (two to three weeks delivery): \$69.95 one year. Except where noted, payable in U.S. currency.

NEWSSTAND CIRCULATION

Newsstand circulation through Disticor Magazine Distribution Services. For more information, call (905) 619-6565, fax (905) 619-2903, or email mraucci@disticor.com.

ADVERTISING

Advertisement in *Sojourners* does not imply editorial endorsement. For information on display advertising in *Sojourners*, please write to: Advertising, Sojourners, 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002; advertising@sojo.net, or visit sojo.net.

SUBMISSIONS

Submission guidelines can be found at: sojo.net/write. Please direct poetry to the Poetry Editor by post (address below) or at poetry@sojo.net; and books, music, and reviews to the Review Editor by post or at reviews@sojo.net. No submissions will be returned.

Printed in the U.S.A. on recycled paper. All content copyright ©2020 Sojourners 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. Phone (202) 328-8842



34.7%

Error rate of facial recognition software when identifying dark-skinned women.

0.8%

Error rate when identifying light-skinned men.

1 in 4

Ratio of Americans who think government should strictly limit facial recognition technology.



1

MOBILIZING HOPE

BY ADAM RUSSELL TAYLOR

DESERT MOMENTS

Lent is a season of introspection and reflection as we prepare for Easter. By observing the 40 days of Lent, we replicate Jesus' sacrifice and withdrawal into the desert for 40 days.

When I was 16, my mom accepted a new job at the University of Arizona, and my parents made the untimely decision to uproot our family and move from the Pacific Northwest to the Arizona desert just before my last year in high school. As a result, I know something about deserts.

Deserts are not simply physical places—they are also spiritual and emotional seasons in our lives. What the physical desert does to the body, the spiritual desert does to our soul, making us feel drained and depleted. In moments of spiritual desert, we can

"MANY JUSTICE LEADERS BURN OUT BECAUSE THEIR STARTING POINT IS RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION RATHER THAN STEADFAST LOVE."

“DISCERNMENT ENABLES US TO SEE HOPE IN SEEMINGLY HOPELESS SITUATIONS.”

feel disoriented and alienated from God. St. John of the Cross referred to these as dark nights of the soul—times when “we feel a spiritual drought and estrangement from God.”

Nations can also go through what feel like periods of desert. America seems stuck in a dire one now. The current political crisis represents a test of our democracy and of the witness of the church. U.S. Christianity is also facing desert times as younger Christians abandon the church in record numbers.

Jesus knew something about deserts. He spent 40 trying and formative days fasting and wandering in the desert, just before he faced and overcame the devil’s three temptations of instant gratification, power, and control, which helped prepare him for his three years of public ministry. Time in the desert can be essential to prepare us for and sustain the long, hard work of seeking justice and advancing God’s reign.

The desert provides time for preparation through deeper discernment. Time in the desert gives us the space to think more deeply, listen more carefully, and see more clearly. Solitude and silence must be learned and practiced. In the context of pursuing justice, discernment sharpens our analysis and enables us

to see possibility in the impossible and hope in seemingly hopeless situations.

Second, time in the desert provides a time for purification. Many justice leaders burn out because their starting point is righteous indignation rather than steadfast love. Our soul yearns for the purification and renewal that real and regular contemplation provides. Contemplation grounds and sustains faith-inspired activism. As Christian leaders and activists, we must constantly resist the dangers of self-righteousness, absolutism, and, at worst, demonizing and hating our opponents and enemies, which has become all too common in American politics. We must overcome the evil that is external but also the evil that lies within each of us.

Third, the desert provides a time for total surrender. All genuine spirituality requires letting go. Letting go of illusion, ego, and sin. In the desert, we must be willing to give everything to God—our past regrets and hurts, our present problems and doubts, our future fears and dreams. In the desert, we are reminded that there is no burden that God cannot carry, there is no yoke that is too heavy for God.

Our communities, nation, and world may be in a harsh and difficult time—but if we engage in deeper discernment, purify ourselves, and surrender to God, we will be better equipped to lead out of the desert, transforming ourselves, our nation, and our world. ✦



Adam Russell Taylor is executive director of Sojourners.

LIMITLESS MINISTRY

Online seminary education that's
relevant, real, and rich in deep
understanding and practical experience.

LEARN MORE! lextheo.edu

lexington
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

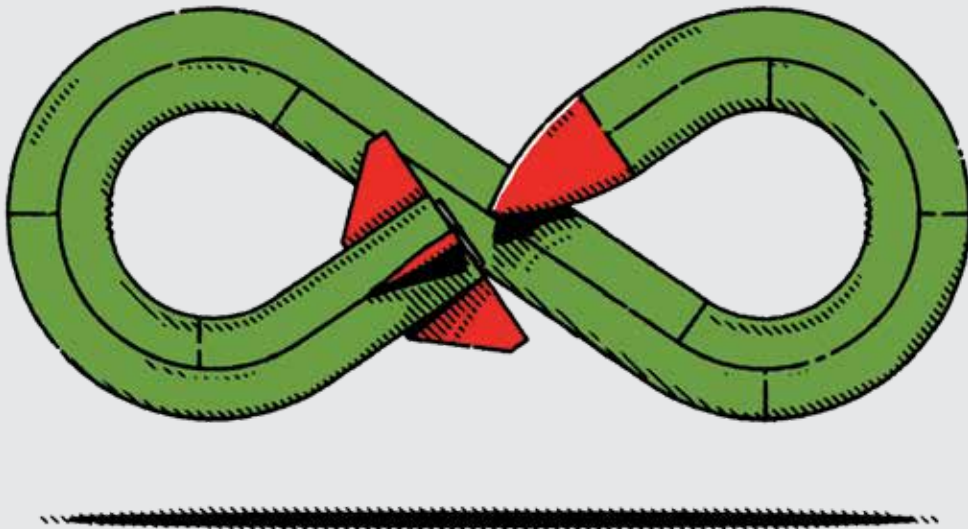
LOVE JESUS
grow in faith
CHANGE THE WORLD

Sunday School that lights the way.
www.ShineCurriculum.com

SHINE
LIVING IN GOD'S LIGHT

A SCAFFOLD OF LIES

While Trump throws fuel on the Middle East tinderbox, peacemakers wrestle with the challenge of peace in endless war.



2

In 2016, candidate Donald Trump vowed to halt “endless wars.” The Democratic candidates running for president this year have made similar promises.

Yet, following the drone-strike killing of Iran’s senior military commander in early January, more troops are going to the Middle East and military tensions have increased. U.S. forces continue to drop bombs and conduct combat operations in Afghanistan and other countries, as Washington’s propensity for military intervention shows little sign of abating. The power of the Pentagon has increased and will grow further in the years ahead as the 2020 military budget doubles down on money and weapons to wage war across the globe.

When most of us hear the term endless war, we think of Afghanistan. Rightly so, as the war is now in its 19th year, with no end in sight. For years we were told by political leaders, including President Obama, that the Afghanistan conflict was a legal and justified war, as opposed to the illegal

invasion and occupation of Iraq. Our persistent efforts, we were told, were paying off in countering terrorism and advancing democracy and human rights.

Now we know this was a lie. The release of the so-called Afghanistan Papers in December revealed systematic deception and failure. Based on 2,000 pages of confidential interviews with those who fought and directed the war, the Afghanistan Papers confirm that Pentagon and White House officials made claims of success they knew to be false and refused to admit the war was unwinnable. By most metrics, the war has been a colossal failure. Terrorist violence has increased in Afghanistan and around the world. The Taliban has steadily gained control over much of the country. The Kabul government and armed forces are inept and corrupt and lack legitimacy. Human rights abuse is rampant.

The Afghanistan Papers, like the Pentagon Papers on the Vietnam War 50 years earlier, document appalling levels of government deceit and political cowardice. In Afghanistan as in Vietnam, White House and Pentagon leaders knew the cause was lost but continued the killing to avoid being held responsible for defeat. Tens of thousands of civilians and soldiers died to protect the careers of politicians and military commanders who were unwilling to admit failure.

There are tragic but obvious lessons in these wars. They are the same lessons that emerge from American interventions in Iraq and Syria, the debacle of our supposed “success” in overthrowing the Gadhafi government of Libya, and the futility of continued military operations and support for proxy wars in Yemen, Somalia, and other countries.

War is not the answer to the problems of terrorism and instability that threaten parts of the world. Research shows that terrorism ends through political settlements and accountable, effective policing, not the use of military force. U.S. military intervention often makes matters worse and generates greater violence, not less.

Policymakers in the White House and Congress ignore these realities and continue to fund the U.S. war machine, allocating a staggering \$738 billion for the 2020 military budget. Included in this budget are tens of billions of dollars for what military officials euphemistically term “overseas contingency” operations—

“TENS OF THOUSANDS DIED TO PROTECT THE CAREERS OF POLITICIANS AND MILITARY COMMANDERS WHO WERE UNWILLING TO ADMIT FAILURE.”

military engagements in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and beyond. The budget funds the purchase of hundreds of fighter-bombers, attack aircraft, and drones, enhancing the ability of U.S. forces to continue bombing people in other countries. The budget also purchases more than a dozen new naval ships for the increasingly assertive U.S. military confrontation toward Russia and China.

The 2020 military budget maintains the Authorization to Use Military Force (AUMF), a sweeping measure adopted immediately after the 9/11 attacks that provides blanket authority for the use of military force anywhere in the world, supposedly to counter terrorism but often as intervention in civil conflicts between opposing local forces. The AUMF is the charter for endless war, the legal basis for military operations in Afghanistan and other countries. In July 2019, the House approved an amendment repealing this unlimited authority, as well as an amendment prohibiting military action against Iran without congressional approval. The White House opposed those measures and the Republican majority in the Senate killed them.

It’s hard to be hopeful in the face of rampant militarism and endless war, but polls show that most veterans who served in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the general public, believe those wars were not worth fighting. The election campaigns this year offer an opportunity to harness that sentiment into political pressure for finally ending the forever war and further military confrontation with Iran and for reordering budget priorities away from military intervention toward building the foundations of international peace through diplomacy, development, and good governance. ❖

David Cortright is director of the Peace Accords Matrix at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at Notre Dame in Indiana. His most recent book is *Waging Peace in Vietnam*.

Master of Arts: Theopoetics and Writing

The **first** of its kind –
with teaching
on the
cutting edge.

Bringing together
theology ■ poetry
narrative ■ spirituality
public conversation
toward creative
communication



admissions@bethanyseminary.edu
bethanyseminary.edu

Bethany
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

COMMENTARY

BY JULIE POLTER



FINDING LIFE IN THE ASHES

Lent is an experiment in overturning the power of death.

On Ash Wednesday the dust from which we came and to which we return is daubed on Christians' foreheads. It is an intimate reminder that the Spirit of God breathes in us and we live; without the Spirit we crumble.

To be more Christlike means facing death in all its forms—the death of reputation, the death of truth, and the bodily death of our beloveds. Lenten scriptures keep before us stories of temptation, failure, and the heavy machinery of this empire or that, always shifting into position to crush those who threaten human power and wealth. There are hints of resurrection in the lectionary readings, but the pain and destruction of dreams and life that comes before is given its full due.

We are too well acquainted with the world and its ways not to imagine what massacre or plague filled that valley with dry bones in Ezekiel's vision. And, in John's gospel, Jesus is confronted by Lazarus' grieving, accusing sister. Why did you not come when called? Mary demands, while

Lazarus was alive and could be healed. The story is raw with the pitch of her rage and Jesus' own tears.

Isn't the daily news grim enough, without also dwelling in church on all that is broken? The wisdom of Lent is that if we leap ahead without taking a measure of how powerful and omnipresent death is—corroding our souls as well as stalking our bodies—resurrection is reduced to a cosmic carnival trick, with eternal life the prize for those who live well.

Without Lent we may easily brush aside how sin kills us a little each day and entangles us in its death-dealing ways. The writer David Dark often tweets a single-line response to news of a leader mocking the vulnerable or a policy decision that will inflict suffering or kill people: "There are so many ways to hate God."

Paul wrote, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Here death might refer in part to our inevitable crumbling to mortal dust or to the unconscious (and for some, conscious) ways we contribute to the killing of others. But it also speaks to the soul corruption, the unintended consequences, the needless burdens that sin causes. The death that comes in small nibbles and slow decay of compassion, empathy, safety nets, checks and balances.

In complex human systems—a commercial aircraft manufacturer, for example—a few peoples' individual choices to give a go-ahead despite warning signs or to stay silent when convinced of a product's deadly flaw can result in hundreds of people dying. Greed, a desire for security, or self-absorption can lead us to hoard our money or our hearts or wield them as power over others. And most of us (and our institutions) are warped—wounding or wounded by the way centuries of racism and colonialism continue to order our attitudes and our opportunities.

Lent is a way to experiment with shaking off a little of our sin and lean into a story that is about overturning the power of death in small and large ways. We may—we *will*—find that we can't do it alone. We need help. We need community. We need a God who is reaching toward us and isn't afraid of meeting us at the point of our worst sin, a God who knows death intimately, and pulls us toward life. ✦

Julie Polter is managing editor of *Sojourners*.

O

THOU SHALT NOT BE APATHETIC

On a cold January day in 2010, Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens felt so strongly about the dangers of corruption that he delivered a rare oral dissent in the *Citizens United* case. Decrying the majority's "crabbed view of corruption" that focused on quid pro quo arrangements exclusively, Justice Stevens countered, "There are threats of corruption that are far more destructive to democratic society than the odd bribe. Yet the majority's understanding of corruption would leave lawmakers impotent to address all but the most discrete abuses."

In retrospect, the striking thing from that winter morning was not so much the existence of Steven's oral dissent (though notable), but the basic agreement on all sides. No one on the court contested the idea that corruption poses a threat to "democratic society." The majority and the minority simply split on whether the specific practice at issue constituted a form of corruption.

Ten years later, we cannot take the same presupposition for granted. Instead of identifying corruption as a danger to the republic, we are all too ready to treat it as an inescapable part of American life. Indeed, the rationalizations have now become as predictable as they are depressing: It may be distasteful, but both sides do it. It is a necessary evil. Get over it.

Although this resignation may seem like a justified self-protection mechanism, Christians cannot succumb to the temptation to normalize political corruption as an inevitable and therefore acceptable outgrowth of organized civic life. Such a claim runs counter to Christians' theological accounts of the role government is designed to serve.

Admittedly, the role of government has been a contested theological ques-



tion for Christians, with views ranging from Eusebius' justification of Christendom in the fourth century to the Radical Reformation's strict separation of church and state to contemporary Christian anarchists' opposition to the state as a whole. None of these interpretations, however, yields any basis for an apathetic response to political corruption.

On the contrary, the one unifying feature between these views is the notion that the nature and purpose of government is intricately linked to humanity's proclivity for sin after the Fall. In this context, political corruption is a theological concern because it threatens to destroy a valuable resource for pilgrims navigating a sinful world.

After all, Christians have identified two essential functions for government in a postlapsarian state. First, following the apostle Paul's conviction that temporal authorities "are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer" (Romans 13:4), major figures such as Augustine and Luther have argued that government is necessary to restrain sinful impulses, creating and enforcing laws that limit harmful conduct. Second, given government's ability to form its citizens, Aquinas and others have added the responsibility not simply to prohibit vice but also to promote virtue.

Together, these two functions put government at the service of the common good, in the Christian approach. Corruption contradicts this vision, turning the vehicle of public trust into a means of private gain.

Consequently, U.S. Christians cannot treat political corruption as an unfortunate but unavoidable feature of government today, but must instead condemn its growing influence. Failing to do so will mean not simply that our system of government has succumbed to corruption, but that our tradition has as well. ✕

**"CHRISTIANS HAVE
A RESPONSIBILITY
NOT SIMPLY TO
PROHIBIT VICE
BUT TO PROMOTE
VIRTUE."**

Conor M. Kelly teaches theological ethics at Marquette University in Wisconsin.

THE HUNGRY SPIRIT

BY ROSE MARIE BERGER

THE GOSPEL IN YOUR POCKET

3



If Jesus brought good news to the poor today, it might look like one of Shaunna Burns' videos.

Burns is an honest-to-God evangelist on TikTok, the fast-growing, Chinese-owned, short-form video-sharing social network. Translate Jesus' "brood of vipers" and "whitewashed tombs" into f-bombs and salty vernacular and you get Burns' practical "good news" that's changing lives.

A former debt collector, Burns knows all about the shady practices of collection agencies. But she didn't start her 60-second "debt pro tips" on TikTok until she got a call herself from a collection agency harassing her for her daughter's medical bills.

"Hey, guys. So, here's some quick debt-collection pro tips," North Carolina-based Burns starts in her first video in December. She then instructs the uninformed: It's illegal for debt collectors to call outside of certain hours. Medical debt has a statute of limitations—usually three to six years—that varies by state. Always ask a collector for a copy of your original signed invoice.

One of Burns' debt TikToks garnered more than 400,000 likes. Grateful response videos reveal how folks are putting her advice into action.

"Debt doesn't equal deadbeat. I'm not a deadbeat, and I have great credit, and I'm still having to deal with debt collection," Burns told *Business Insider*. "I literally spent hours a week fighting with insurance companies over stupid bills ... and I thought if I could help one person [with the TikToks], it would be worth it."

**"GOD HAS ANOINTED
THEM TO USE THEIR
SMARTPHONES AND SHARPIES
TO BRING GOOD NEWS."**

Within two weeks of her first debt-collection video, a post went up on a trade site for debt collectors warning them to take note of Burns because people “will be attempting to follow her advice.”

“I am a believer,” Burns told me. “I have so much faith. All I ever wanted to do as a foster kid growing up was to help people. So, it’s an answer to my prayers.”

If Jesus brought good news to the poor today, it might be passed from hand to hand among refugees, like *The Didactic Wall Handbook*, by Bosnian artist Mladen Miljanović.

A former lieutenant in the Bosnian army, Miljanović wanted to successfully apply his military training to promote peace—and do it as an artist. He designed a field manual to aid refugees on their journey to Western Europe: a set of illustrations and instructions for scaling barbed-wire barriers (with children), avoiding drone surveillance, orienteering, and offering simple first aid. All translated to Arabic, English, Spanish, and Urdu. The book is pocket-sized for easy transport, in black and white for readability in low light, and made up mostly of images. The final instructions? “In the case of emergency to reveal your location roll this book and burn it!”

Miljanović engraved similar instructions on a marble panel publicly displayed in Bihać, a border town where many Syrian, Afghan, Pakistani, North African, and Iraqi migrant families congregate. He’s distributed all the original 1,000 books, and downloads of the electronic version are skyrocketing.

I asked Miljanović what prompted this endeavor. “Can we succeed in any field, including art, if we fail as humans?” he replied.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Burns and Miljanović because God has anointed them to use their smartphones and sharpies to bring good news to the ones scraping change out of the car seats to buy baby formula and soothing children huddled under Mylar blankets beneath bridges.

Be fierce, creative, and practical in your desire to do good. ❧

Rose Marie Berger is senior associate editor of *Sojourners*, a Catholic peace activist, and author of *Bending the Arch*.



Develop your passion for God’s justice and peace. Discover options from **Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary!**

SEEK THE PEACE OF THE CITY

Study theology and practice transformative peacebuilding in the **Master of Arts: Theology and Peace Studies** program. Explore a variety of internships. Consider an optional concentration in **Environmental Sustainability Leadership**.

WANT TO STUDY AT A DISTANCE? AMBS has degrees for fully-online or distance learning.

GENEROUS NEED-BASED AID IS AVAILABLE.

LIFELONG LEARNING • NON-DEGREE

Give seminary a try: Take a short course!

Online • No exams or papers • Only six weeks

COMING UP: Transforming Congregational Conflict and Communication. April 15 – May 26

LEARN MORE: ambs.edu/grow
Elkhart, Indiana • Rooted in the Word, Growing in Christ

UNDER THE SUN

BY JEANIA REE V. MOORE

'IS THIS NOT THE FAST I HAVE CHOSEN?'



For much of my life I thought of Lent primarily as a season of personal piety, a self-contained period of reflection on individual sin and repentance. This penitential practice was limited in both scope and duration: It had little to do with others apart from me and God, and its impact did not extend beyond Easter. I approached a

central component of Lent—the fast—like a trial, a test of willpower that pitted God against some “thing” I had given up, often a food (usually cheese or dessert). Much to my chagrin, in this personal test of will, God did not always win out. Overall, I was grateful and relieved each year when Lent ended.

Two years ago, things changed. As a dairy and meat aficionado who unexpectedly found herself a convert to vegetarianism and pondering veganism, I suddenly had a new relationship with chosen fasts. (The cause: *Eating Animals*, a book on factory farms written by Jonathan Safran Foer, collaborating with Jewish ethicist Aaron Gross. Read at your own dietary risk.) Vegetarianism helped me engage fasting as something internally motivated by ethical and spiritual concerns, rather than externally imposed. Participating in my church’s annual Daniel Fast later

“FASTING IS NOT ABOUT WILLPOWER, BUT SURRENDER.”

that year deepened this new experiential understanding. Based on Daniel 1 and featuring weekly 12-hour periods with no food, this fast helped me experience how fasting is not about willpower, but surrender. It taught me about hubris, humility, and moment-by-moment reliance upon God, which often involved other people.

These experiences reintroduced me to fasting as a meaningful mode of connection to God and the world. Rather than being solely between me and God, vegetarianism and the Daniel Fast engaged my relationships with others, whether through bouts of “hangry”-ness, gratefully received gifts of food, a newfound awareness of those whose encounters with hunger far surpass mine, or my ongoing attempts to relate differently to farmed animals. Instead of having a specified end date, fasting’s impact endured, changing my relationships with God and the world around me. Fasting became, in effect, a channel for justice. Through fasting, I learned to nourish a different kind of hunger.

In the Bible, fasts are tools of spiritual preparation that help individuals or groups address social or political crises or endeavors—for example, Esther’s plea before King Ahasuerus, Daniel’s captivity in the Babylonian court, and Jesus’ 40 days in the wilderness to start his ministry. The prophet Isaiah writes: “Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?” Isaiah reminds us that fasting is not about piety, but liberation. As a spiritual practice righting relationship with God, fasting involves our relationships with others.

At a time when social and political crises of all sorts loom, Lenten fasts are vital tools for individual and communal spiritual health. Lent is an opportunity to acknowledge and address that sin—and salvation—is corporate. Borrowing from Mordecai, Lent is for such a time as this. ✦

Jeania Ree V. Moore is a United Methodist deacon who writes theological aesthetics, practices the arts, and works in faith-based social justice in Washington, D.C.



IT TAKES A COMMUNITY, AND MORE

My husband and I are privileged to have health care for ourselves and our children. While access to health care is a serious and growing concern in our nation, as well as in our own state of Texas, we realize what a privilege it is to afford, even if barely, health care through our respective employers.

Not too long ago my husband was rushed to the emergency room, and later ICU, in a near-diabetic coma. Last year, we were heartbroken over our toddler's unexplained seizures. It took nearly four months before she was seen by a neurologist and another six weeks to be able to get an MRI. Two more months passed before we could return to the neurologist for results. For more than eight months, we had to wait on an answer, while our faith was stretched thin. When would God show up?

**"WE SHOULD NOT HAVE
TO CHOOSE BETWEEN
GROCERIES, CHILD
CARE, AND UNPAID
HEALTH CARE BILLS."**

According to The Commonwealth Fund, Texas ranks 49th of the 50 states for worst health care in terms of access, outcomes, and costs. Texas has also opted not to expand Medicaid eligibility, which has had devastating consequences in our communities. Our elders will say that faith is what keeps them alive when the health care system has repeatedly failed them. Younger generations will say we should not have to choose between groceries, child care, and unpaid health care bills. We have been to the pediatrician, therapy, primary care, specialist, emergency room, and ICU more than we would like. While medical bills stack up, so too our student loans, mortgage, and other priorities. Without health insurance, this would all be more of a nightmare. I cannot imagine what it is like for the undocumented, refugees, and those unable to afford basic health care. How have we failed them? Universal health care is our country's moral obligation.

We could not have coped with all this without a community of faith. During my husband's stay in ICU, our community and church came through in ways we did not expect. When we had little faith, my *comadres* (friends) had faith for us. When I was too mentally exhausted to cook for the kids, my community cooked for us or sent gift cards. I don't know what we would have done without them.

Miraculously, our child's seizures went away before we ever got to the appointment to receive the test results, which provided no clear explanation. Perhaps it was our community's collective prayers, the eggs we swept over her body to cure her of *mal de ojo* (in a practice rooted in traditional Mexican folk medicine), or both. With a shred of faith and our sacred community, and access to health care, we endured one of the most challenging and confusing times in our lives. "It takes a village" is an understatement; proper health care takes a community and an act of Congress. ✦

Carolina Hinojosa-Cisneros is a Tejana, Chicana, and Mujerista from San Antonio, Texas, where she is a graduate student at Our Lady of the Lake University. She is the 2019 Recipient of the Rubem Alves Award in Theopoetics.

EYEWITNESS

4



**"YOU HAVE TO TELL
PEOPLE WHAT
WAR IS LIKE."**

WAR LIVES ON INSIDE YOU

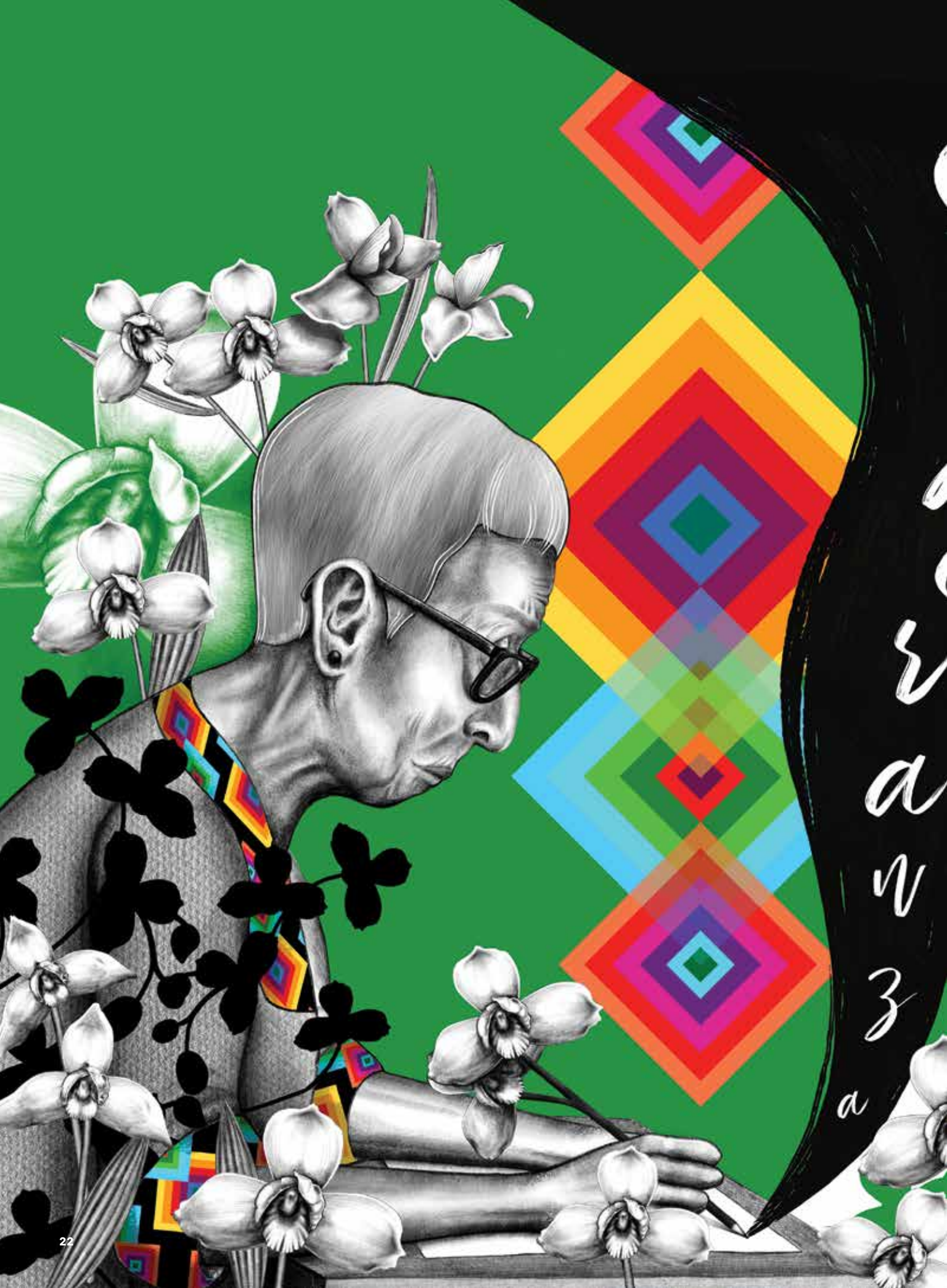
"If PTSD results from being the *prey*—re-experiencing the feeling that something is hunting you, hurting you, trying to kill you—then moral injury results from being the *predator*—where you have done things to hurt people.

I hear moral injury when a veteran tells me, 'If people knew what I had done ...' or 'I can't walk into church.' Sometimes it takes a form of humor, where people joke about not wanting to be around 'holy stuff.' In a story of St. Martin of Tours, a Roman soldier who is baptized and converts to Christianity, after he leaves the army to enter the monastery, he refuses to come to the altar, and he cowers in the corner. He feels this distance from the holy. I see this pattern over and over again in veterans' experience throughout church history and in the brothers and sisters I went to war with; their sense of who they are is altered.

If you've had this experience of war, you become a prophet. You have to tell people what war is like and what it does to people—the rest of the world needs that witness. Otherwise, we're going to just go right back into it if we don't hear it.

Joining the military is kind of easy; it's leaving that's really hard. The young men and women being deployed today, they don't know about all that yet. And I pray for them, that they'll have compassionate leaders that can see their symptoms if they're having struggles. And I pray for peace. I pray that they have a boring deployment—and come back." ♦

Rev. David Peters is vicar of a Pflugerville church plant in the Diocese of Texas and founder of the Episcopal Veterans Fellowship. He spoke with *Sojourners* associate editor Betsy Shirley about his experience as an army chaplain in Iraq and his current ministry to veterans.



va
a
n
3
a



'They Have Threatened Us With Resurrection'

Poet Julia Esquivel held nations accountable
for death while her actions and words
stood as a celebration of life.

By EMILIE TERESA SMITH
Illustrations by ALE DE LA TORRE



I met Julia Esquivel for the first time in Mexico City, on a rainy afternoon more than 30 years ago, after my 2-year-old son, Abraham, and I crossed the exasperating metropolis by bus and clanky train. Flustered and dripping, I knocked on the door of her tidy home. Esquivel lived in exile, far from her beloved homeland, Guatemala. Henchmen in the service of Guatemala's military rulers had pursued her relentlessly until at last she fled. I, a young, earnest Canadian, was traveling the northern continent, from Montreal to Costa Rica, preparing to write a book, recording the voices of women—such as Esquivel—scattered in this Guatemalan diaspora.

Esquivel was slender and small, silver hair framing her delicate, elegant face. She ushered us into her house, where we sat on cushions on the floor, drank hot tea, and read stories about St. Francis and a very bad wolf. We talked while Abraham toddled around, and we prayed. That was Esquivel: determined to pray through hurricanes, from the unimaginably large to the very small.

Our friendship spanned the decades. She was to become one of my greatest teachers. Because of Esquivel, who passed away last July, I—raised in a radically atheist household—am now a Christian. Esquivel first cracked open faith for me, showing my young rebellious self that the strongest power for transformation, for individuals as well as nations, came from a place of stubborn grace, a grace, like hers, that never surrendered.

The way a country treats its children

Julia Esquivel was born in 1930, in the western highlands of Guatemala, to a middle-class, progressive family. She was a surprise daughter to an older couple who had been told they would never have children. She grew up treasured. At 7, she said, she found herself before an image of Jesus on the cross; her heart broke with compassion for his suffering.

In 1947, Esquivel became a teacher, and several years later she traveled to Costa Rica to study theology. For a while, she tried on the idea of becoming a minister—first in the Presbyterian Church. She quickly found that the church refused to ordain women. From that time forward, she considered herself a Christian without a particular denomination; she called every imperfect church her home. She worshipped with Mennonites, Episcopalians, and Catholics.

Like people in any family, she quarreled with her siblings: other church members and, particularly, leaders. Young and



Emilie Teresa Smith

“They questioned how far my faith in Jesus went. Was it a faith only concerned with personal salvation?”

Julia Esquivel
1930-2019



filled with passion, she actually *expected* the widows and orphans to be cared for and the poor to be attended to with compassion. She believed this concrete truth: Jesus Christ made room for everyone at the table, starting with those who had been rejected by the world. Time and time again, she clashed with polite church institutions that did not embody what she believed were gospel values: inclusion, justice, the sharing of goods and gifts. Early in her young adulthood, Esquivel decided she would never marry, saying that even a good marriage would have stifled her.

For 12 years, Esquivel taught in a Protestant high school in Guatemala City. Then, in the 1960s, she began to visit the state-run Ciudad de Niños, a youth detention center. There, she told me, was where she had her second conversion.

"These young people brought me to the gospel. They questioned how far my faith in Jesus went. Was it a faith only concerned with personal salvation?"

This second conversion asked Esquivel tough questions about society and faith. "The way a country treats its children and adolescents is a measure of how humane or inhumane that society is," she said categorically. These forgotten, abused children were signs of the state's absolute failing. But the church had failed them too. She observed that churches—Protestant and Catholic—were stuck in a stale ecclesiolo-

gy that favored the privileged. Those who had been born into wealth and power acted as if they owned the churches. Esquivel's search for a faith in action expanded.

In the late 1960s, the Latin American Catholic Church was rocked by the afterquakes of the Second Vatican Council. Vatican II was a three-year gathering in Rome called by Pope John XXIII that radically changed the way the Catholic Church related to the world. The church invited its leadership—and all the faithful—to go out into the streets and countryside and engage deeply with the lives of real people, especially the poor. The Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops—a response to Vatican II that took place in Medellín, Colombia, in 1968—brought the



She actually expected the widows and orphans to be cared for and the poor to be attended to with compassion.

church into an ever-deepening commitment to social change, from its leadership down to the grassroots. Liberation theology—an understanding of faith that puts the struggle of the poor and exploited at its center, sacrificing a soft religiosity that soothed the gilded faithful—was launched across Latin America.

In 1970, ever-ecumenical Esquivel founded a magazine, *Dialogo*, with an accompanying radio program. Both the magazine and the radio show addressed the commitment of societal transformation. The *Dialogo* team set off to record stories from the interior of Guatemala, where centuries-old structures of injustice ravaged the poor.

A time of trial

Guatemala is unique in Latin America: The majority of its population consists of Indigenous people from 22 Mayan nations and one non-Mayan Indigenous group, the Xinka. The invading Spaniards of 1524 were after gold but, finding little, settled for agriculture, exploiting the Indigenous survivors of the conquest.

To this day, lands in Guatemala are among the most unevenly distributed in the continent. In El Quiche, the region where I lived for years, 70 percent of children are chronically malnourished. The most recent attempt to change this situation resulted in a protracted internal war—a 36-year nightmare—which ended, officially, in 1996. Government forces, rooting out a weak insurgency, slaughtered whole communities. Six hundred villages were destroyed. More than 200,000 people died or disappeared, and 1 million people—more than a tenth of the population—fled either into internal displacement or exile over the borders into Mexico and beyond.

The war ended, but the fierce injustices that provoked it were never resolved. Trauma sank deep into survivors' lives, while the perpetrators became permanent power holders. Guatemala today is racked with terror linked to this past, visible now in relentless gang and drug violence, pushing catastrophic numbers

of Guatemalans to flee north. Children die in detention at the U.S.-Mexico border, victims of this history of horror.

In the mid-1970s, as the wave of state violence peaked, Esquivel came under direct attack. The death squads were at her heels. At one point she fled her house, barefoot, in the middle of the night. She described it to me as a “prophetic” experience, a kind of holy reaction to horror: With death all around her, in her mind fantastic and shockingly real spiritual beings filled the air. She escaped down the dark highway to Guatemala’s Pacific coast and made her way to the house of Catholic priests in the town of Santa Lucia Cotzumalguapa.

After a short while, Esquivel set out on foot again. Two priests from Santa Lucia Cotzumalguapa were murdered shortly after. Esquivel managed to travel to the Tzutujil Maya community of Santiago Atitlan. There, she was received by compassionate elders who had known her in better times. They cared for her in prayer and fed her, bathed her, and sang to her. After she recovered, she returned to her small house, but friends insisted that the time had come for her to leave the country. She traveled to the ecumenical monastic community of Grandchamp in Switzerland, where she lived from 1980 to 1987.

The next phase was a time of trial. Away from her beloved people, but aware of the increasing genocide back home, Esquivel suffered the haunting guilt and loneliness of the survivor. “Why am I left alive?” she wondered. Many times, she told me, she would find her body bleeding its pain.

“I cried every day, going about my daily chores in the religious community,” she recalled. “I would wake up in the early hours of the morning and my nightgown would have spots of blood on it, because blood vessels in my skin were bursting from the tension of hearing these things and dreaming the rivers of blood. I could see, with the eyes of my heart, all the little towns like Pachay de las Lomas, Los

Jometes, El Ixcan, all these little corners where I had been, and I could imagine the women in terror, the children turned into the soldiers' football, the old people with their heads cut off. The genocide."

A carrier of the Word

Esquivel was transformed. In stunned grief, and in the loudest way possible, she denounced the horrors going on in her homeland—and the direct connections between the violence in the Guatemalan highlands and the global U.S. Cold War strategy, which aimed to destroy social protest anywhere in the world believed to have a hint of communism.

Esquivel took up her pen. She wrote hundreds of poems and published four books, two of which came out in English: *Threatened With Resurrection* and *The Certainty of Spring*. With these publications

**They have threatened us
with Resurrection ...
because in this marathon of Hope,
there are always others to relieve us
who carry the strength
to reach the finish line
which lies beyond death.**

—Julia Esquivel

and her outspoken presence at countless international gatherings, including the 1983 meeting of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver, British Columbia, Esquivel made herself heard. Standing in the center of the crucifixion of her people, she was able to declare that in the end, death would not win. Her words were a soothing balm to the survivors, a reminder that, in the midst of their ferocious suffering, they were not forgotten. And so she became not only a poet and a prophet, but also a comforting pastor holding out for her scattered people Christ's unquenchable promise of life.

During fall 1998, about 10 years after Esquivel and I first met, I went to the Vancouver School of Theology to inquire about

the priesthood. Esquivel visited Vancouver soon after, and we talked for days. She was delighted about my new path—and worried. Did I know what I was getting into? Could I really dream to be a carrier of the Word? Could I tame my impulsive heart, match humility with wisdom, and find a way to hold onto this light in a broken world? Despite all the contradictions, I tiptoed into the priesthood.

In 2009, ordained and with a few years of parish ministry behind me, I moved again to Guatemala, where I would live for the next four years at the ground zero of the genocide, in Santa Cruz del Quiche. I rented a house right across from what had been an army headquarters, a planning and launching spot for military sweeps as well as a torture center and prison. Often, overwhelmed with the sorrow, terror, and sheer suffering around me, I would jump on a chicken bus, barrel down the highway for a few hours, and leap off a block from Esquivel's house. She had returned to Guatemala, to her own little sanctuary of books and modest, beautiful things, and there she prayed and wrote. I spent days at her house, sleeping in the tiny maid's quarters. (Esquivel wouldn't have a maid.) The holy days would pass, sometimes in silence, in thoughtful prayer, and sometimes with us laughing out loud, in love with the world.

The last time I saw Esquivel was at a gathering of religious friends not far from Guatemala City, on the site of a blockade up the road from a proposed open-pit mining site. We sat and leaned our heads toward one another. Later that afternoon, I celebrated Mass with some Catholic priests, on a makeshift platform built in the dust. Lifting the host, the bread of life, I glanced at my friend, my beloved teacher. She was sitting quietly, eyes closed. I have no doubt that she was listening to God. ✦

Emilie Teresa Smith is a Canadian Anglican priest and theologian living in Vancouver, British Columbia. She is co-president of the Oscar Romero International Network in Solidarity with the Peoples of Latin America. Julia Esquivel died July 19, 2019, in Guatemala City.

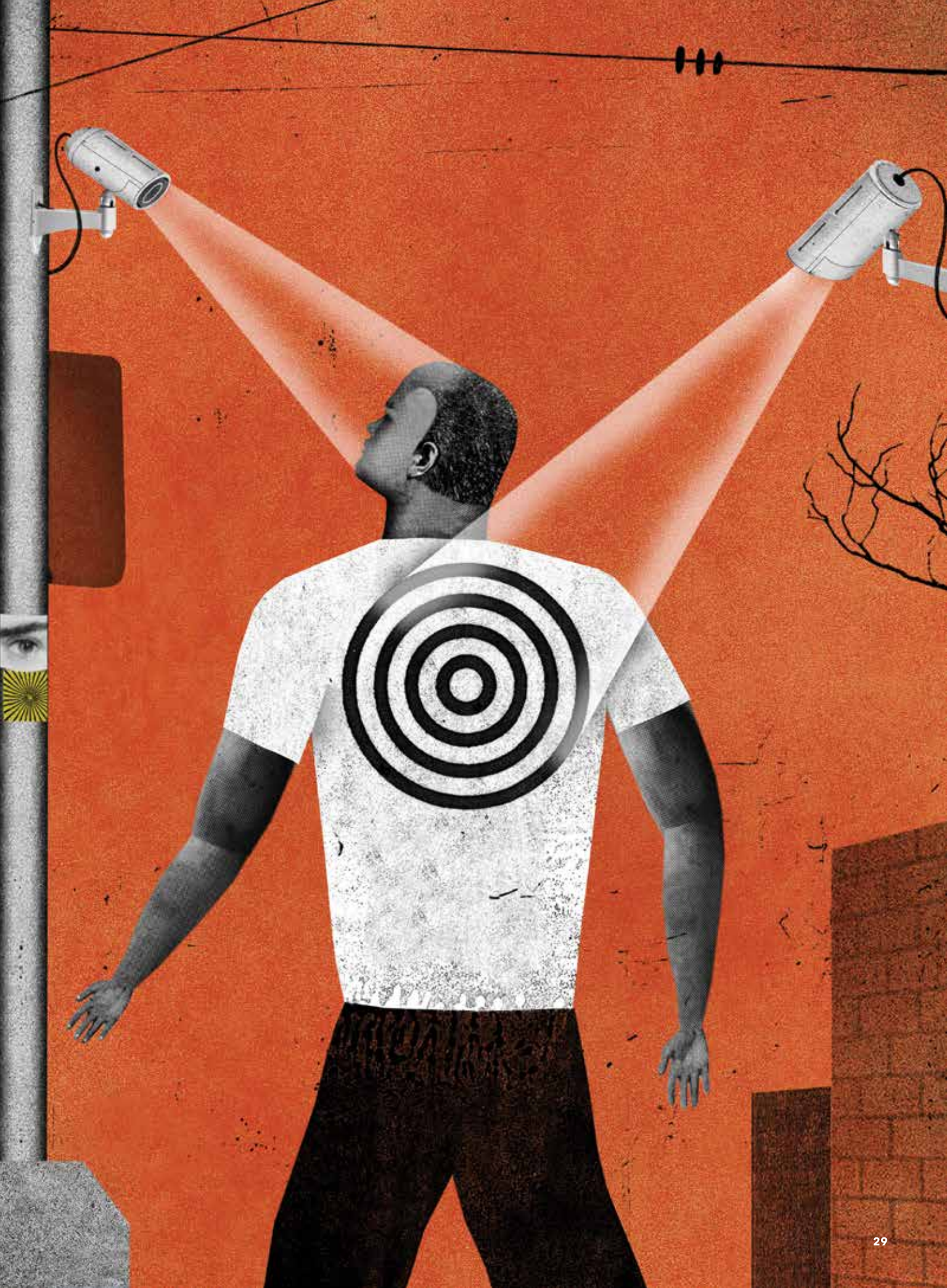


Every Breath You Take

Surveillance is everywhere, and
(surprise) its uses aren't always benign.
People in Detroit are fighting back.

By Bill Wylie-Kellermann

Illustration by David Plunkert





W

We gathered this fall on the steps of St. Peter's Episcopal Church. Summoned by the Detroit chapter of Black Youth Project 100, we were preparing to march a mile-long stretch of gentrified Michigan Avenue, which intersects there. I had served the church for 11 years as pastor, and in the last dozen or so this Catholic Worker neighborhood had been invaded by \$400,000 condos, plus destination bars and restaurants. Among others, guests at our Manna Meal soup kitchen and Kelly's Mission, largely black, are stigmatized and made unwelcome.

But the focus of the march was more than the gentrified influx: Accompanying gentrification has been a heavy increase in electronic surveillance by the so-called Project Green Light, where businesses pay for street cameras that feed to a Real Time Crime Center deep in police headquarters. In areas like this, as with downtown, high surveillance makes white people feel safe for moving in or just shopping and dining.

Dan Gilbert, a mortgage, finance, and development billionaire, owns more than 100 buildings downtown, all covered with the cameras of his own Rock Security. They feed to his corporate center, but also to the police crime center. Detroit Public Schools has its own central command, which is not yet tied to the police center. Likewise, a separate system of streetlight cameras, and even drones, is under development. California recently banned the use of facial recognition software in police body cams, which would convert an instrument of police accountability into a device of surveillance. Michigan has not.

Most Project Green Light cameras are in Detroit neighborhoods, on gas stations, bars, party stores, churches, and clinics. There, each is marked with the constant

flash of green lights that say: You are being watched. When the city demolished a house behind ours, we had to hang light-imperious curtains to prevent green pulsing on our bedroom wall from the funeral home a block away.

For nearly two years, unacknowledged, facial recognition software was being employed by the police department. The software can be used with a "watch list" of persons of interest, plus access mug shots, driver's license and state ID photos, and more—perhaps 40 million Michigan likenesses. A string of recent studies indicates the software can be inaccurate for dark-skinned people, creating false matches and prosecutions. A federal study released in December, according to *The Washington Post*, showed that "Asian and African American people were up to 100 times more likely to be misidentified than white men." Thus, resistance to the system quickly mounted in Detroit, which is 80 percent black.

There are two surveillance-industrial complexes. It's said the days are coming when nations will need to choose which surveillance network to join, the American or the Chinese version—parallel to military alliances. China has 200 million cameras focused on its people, but with 50 million, the U.S. has more cameras per capita. The best facial recognition technology is coming out of Chinese firms, but these are banned in the U.S. because of their connection to "human rights abuses." The Detroit contract is with DataWorks Plus.

Orwell would be astonished

The Black Youth Project 100 march along Michigan Avenue was more like a dance parade, thick with drums, rhythm, and chant: "Black Out Green Light." This stretch is a so-called Green Light Corridor, where all businesses participate, marked with modest and tastefully lighted signs. At each venue we passed—coffee house, bar, restaurant, bagel shop—three or four folks would go inside with signs and leaflets to chant and speak. A nonviolence training a couple weeks prior had prepared participants for the increasing police presence as the action proceeded. Squad cars blared sirens and officers stood by doorways, never blocking entrance, but threatening. Back at the church Rashad Buni of BYP100, which seeks "Black Liberation through a Queer Feminist Lens," called for surveillance funds to be spent instead on neighborhood investment—foreclosure prevention, job training, clean affordable water—as the real source of community security. We all want safe neighborhoods. The question he puts is: By what means?

The downtown vs. neighborhood ex-

“Asian and African American people were up to 100 times more likely to be misidentified than white men.”

perience of Project Green Light reflects a paradox in the new surveillance. On the one hand it is often not just normalized, but voluntary, welcomed, even paid for by those surveilled. Orwell would be astonished that we not only sit in front of laptops that stare back at us but pay for higher and higher resolution cameras that we carry around self-photographing and broadcasting our locations. Folks pay to turn their DNA codes over to Big Data corporations. We hand off our shopping lists in exchange for membership sale prices. For facial recognition, we tag photos of ourselves and friends to confirm what the software has already discerned, or take the “10-year challenge” on Facebook, potentially teaching algorithms to fine tune the processes of aging. We put on watches that track and broadcast our steps, heart rates, and blood pressure. We report our emotional states with elaborate emojis. We eagerly clamor for 5G, which will integrate all our personal data, from printer usage to thermostat settings and security controls. All of these are resistible to one degree or another, and I myself do so as I’m able.

On the other hand, surveillance occurs without consent, notification, or permission. One big backdrop, of course is the Patriot Act, which allowed the NSA to gather and store the phone calls, emails, and text messages of U.S. citizens, even gain backdoor access to your camera. With Project Green Light, anyone even passing by equipped premises is subject to capture and facial recognition. Business owners were never notified that their video feeds were being scanned by DataWorks Plus.

Among the businesses themselves, some have been eager for it, and others feel jammed as though it were a system of extortion, paying for police protection (up to \$6,000 upfront plus a \$1,600 annual fee) and setting up tiers as to who will receive prompt response. Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan has announced plans to require it for businesses open in late hours. In Baltimore, which also has an aggressive facial

recognition program, police scanned the crowds of those protesting the death of Freddie Grey, turning up matches and pulling people with outstanding warrants. It is only two years since Black Lives Matter was reputedly removed from the FBI list of “black identity extremist” organizations.

Though surveillance has always had dimensions both public and private, that distinction is all the more blurred. Project Green Light is a police department program, but it is contracted and funded by private businesses. Ring, Amazon’s surveillance camera division, which began with smart doorbells, has fashioned plans to use facial recognition software in its network of home security systems, creating neighborhood watchlists. Though the program is still in development, connections to local law enforcement are more than contemplated. Imagine residential feeds tied to real-time crime centers. Amazon’s related app, “Neighbors,” creates a residential surveillance social network to share and chat about suspicions. Notice that “neighborhood,” which needs be built on relationship and trust, is thereby turned to signify a circle of fear and suspicion. A review of the app last year by Motherboard found that in a given period the majority of those reported as “suspicious” were people of color.

Being seen, not watched

Through the Detroit Community Technology Project, Tawana “Honeycomb” Petty was instrumental in conducting a study on community experience and perception with respect to personal data capture and storage. Petty wrote:

[Detroiters] expressed experiencing difficulties in having a decent quality of life, based on the tracking and sharing of their information. If they couldn’t afford water, it followed them. If they couldn’t afford to pay tickets, it followed them. If they got into debt and missed payments on utilities, it followed them. They expressed feeling tracked and monitored. That one bad experience prevented good experiences in other areas. They expressed not feeling seen as human, only as a trail of data and bad decisions ... This feeling of being watched and tracked, but not seen, was further exasperated by the implementation of mass surveillance in Detroit.

In sum, she says, “Detroiters want to be seen, not watched.”

I read in that a theological assertion. Simply put, God sees; the powers-that-be watch. No coincidence that in Hebrew, the word for city, *‘yr* or *‘yr re’em* (arguably the earliest naming of the powers biblically), also means the “Watching Angel.” Is this not how Israel in its pastoral nomadism would spiritually name the walled ramparts of the ancient city-state? Its eye turned outward upon them? Constantly scanning the horizon for enemies, outlaws, and the unwelcome? But now the great eye turns inward as well.

There’s no question that historically the om-





niscience of God, combined with a fiery judgment, has been employed by monarchy and empire as rationale and extension to its own surveillance and sanction. The principalities and powers covet God's knowing. Ultimately, they aspire to preempt, usurp, and supplant the omniscience of God, a presumption rooted in fear and objectification. (Technically, that's blasphemy). Divine omniscience, however, the knowing of all things, is an estate of steadfast love. As the psalmist put it, "O God, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up ... Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?"

Surveillance capitalism

Writing in the 1970s, William Stringfellow, preeminent theologian of the powers, counted surveillance a stratagem and tactic of the demonic. He counted it as a debilitating method of rule. By his lights, "the prevalence of industrial and commercial espionage, the monitoring of shoppers" had so habituated human beings to being watched that "tolerance of citizens toward political surveillance and the loss of privacy" was normalized. "The kind of open society contemplated by the First Amendment seems impossible—and, what is more ominous, seems undesirable—to very many Americans." Prescient as he was, he'd still be shocked by the extent to which "the private" has been not just invaded, but plundered and commodified.

The totalization of surveillance by the powers is not only technological but economic. A capitalist system devours new territory. Big Data is a realm currently unregulated and virtually lawless. As capitalism draws more and more things into the market, it commodifies them. Hence, as nature is turned to land and specifically real estate, or work becomes wage labor, so our personal and private human experience (collected and passed along by all those apps) becomes behavioral data rendered to be bought and sold, for the purpose of predicting behavior and even controlling it. Donald Trump was a buyer through Cambridge Analytica in the 2016 election, tailoring ads personally to Facebook users based on their own preferences and personalities—nudging opinions and votes, perhaps more so than Russian meddling. Read the fine print: Privacy policies to which we click "agree" are in actuality surveillance policies. We think we are searching Google, but it is actually

searching and mining us. All of this has been painstakingly detailed by Shoshana Zuboff in her book *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*.

In surveillance studies, a primary historical image comes from 18th century utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham, who conceived the Panopticon ("all seeing"). The design for a prison in the round, all its cells opened inward to the center, where a tower with small windows could keep watch on convicts. At night cells would be lit by a combination of lanterns, mirrors, and windows, illuminating them round the clock. The tower did not even need to be occupied at all times, since the important thing was simply for prisoners to imagine and understand they were being watched. Moreover, Bentham envisioned it as a private prison, run by himself and employing the free labor of the prisoners for profit. Take it as one metaphor for the surveillance society.

Racist technology?

In her book *Dark Matters*, Simone Browne reads the panopticon in light of two other developments. One was the slave ship, a mobile, seagoing prison—precursor to the modern land-based prison. The other was the 18th century lantern laws of New York City that required enslaved people (black, mixed-race, and Indigenous) to carry candle lanterns if they went about the streets after sunset unaccompanied by a white person. They were compelled to show their faces on demand, revealing who was in place and who was out. As Browne says, the legal framework of stop and frisk goes way back.

Can a software technology be racist? Of course it can. Just as white supremacy may be structured into institution, law, or policy, so it can be embedded in algorithms and the constructions of technocracy. Algorithms learn from human behavior, including its biases. Try teaching one to recognize suspicious behavior in front of the house and see who turns out most often to be "suspicious."

In the present instance white supremacy prevails because whiteness is the normative baseline shading for recognition software. The error rate for people of color is especially dangerous in connection with a criminal justice system structurally stacked against them. The mugshot database is already disproportionately black and brown because of the way communities are policed. Mismatching multiplies criminalization. Last year, in an ACLU test, Amazon's recognition software mismatched 27 professional athletes to individuals in a mugshot database. As Eric Williams of the Detroit Justice Center put it, "If it were

Read the fine print: Privacy policies to which we click “agree” are in actuality surveillance policies.

white people who were misidentified at the same rate as black people ... by this technology, we wouldn't even be having this discussion. People would simply say, 'Oh, it doesn't work.'”

The weaponization of facial software

Facial recognition technology can readily be weaponized. The U.S. Army has put out a request to contractors for development of a new generation rifle with facial recognition capability. Two years ago, Stuart Russell of the University of California, Berkeley, who wrote an influential book on artificial intelligence, produced a seven-minute fictional video called “Slaughterbots,” in which a swarm of tiny drones equipped with facial recognition and firepower are released to accomplish targeted assassinations. Fearmongering? Such devices are possible, and *The New York Times* has confirmed witnessing a military test of Styrofoam bots on that scale. It's simply a matter of combining existing technologies, in this case driven less by military desire than commercial interests.

There is no federal legislation regulating facial recognition software. Illinois was the first state to do so. Last year the state supreme court ruled that Illinois residents could sue companies under the 2008 Biometric Information Privacy Act for collecting such data (face and fingerprints) without permission. Facebook is in trouble there. San Francisco was the first major city to ban government use of facial recognition software. Somerville, Mass., and Oakland, Calif., have followed.

Building “relational security”

Detroiters had hoped to ban the use of facial recognition software here. Last summer the focus was on the Board of Police Commissioners, ostensibly a citizen review board that oversees police operations. When the software contract came to light

after nearly two years of secret operation, the development of a policy to regulate usage fell to the board. Their meetings, often lively with community participation, now became regularly raucous. In one, the chair even ordered the arrest of another commissioner. A coalition—including the ACLU, Color of Change, CAIR Michigan, Detroit Justice Center, and the Detroit Hispanic Development Center—publicly urged the board to reject the use of this technology.

By September, a policy document had been refined. To confirm it meant sanctioning and accepting the technology already in place. In what has become emblematic of the commission's attentiveness to community concerns, the board first approved the policy and then opened the floor to public comment. My own remarks to the commission, I confess, were rancorous, accusing the commission not merely of rubberstamping but covering up two years of virtual impunity by the mayor and the chief—employing the technology without public notice or accountability.

The struggle continues. Other systems such as drones and streetlight cameras will require their own policy directives by the commission. Though the city council's record of standing up to the mayor is thin, it will take up the matter, opening the floor to more public action and discussion. A Detroit representative has introduced state legislation that would declare a five-year moratorium on the use of facial recognition, to let policy catch up with technology. And U.S. Rep. Rashida Tlaib of Detroit has introduced federal legislation prohibiting its use in public housing. Nonviolent actions of resistance will need to become more direct and creative.

Corollary to the theological distinction between being watched and being seen, there is an ethic of sorts as well. As means and end, it is the beloved community that sees and trusts, knows and loves. That is the base from which, and method by which, we struggle.

Several years ago, in response to events of police brutality, Peace Zones for Life were organized across the city—introducing community awareness, intervention, and conflict resolution as alternatives to aggressive policing for neighborhood security. One of those zones on the east side has now pioneered a project called “Green Chairs Not Green Lights.” Distributing chairs for elders and others to use on their front porches to keep a loving eye on the block, they propose neighborly solidarity and relational security instead of cameras and software. A principle of self-reliance and self-determination. An act of seeing and knowing. An ethic of beloved community. ✱

Bill Wylie-Kellermann is a nonviolent community activist, author, teacher, and pastor in Detroit. Several themes in this article are developed in his recent book *Principalities in Particular: A Practical Theology of the Powers That Be* (Fortress Press).





The Twisted Roots



BY JOYCE DUBENSKY

Amid the noise of our news cycles, there are the occasional stories that become part of our personal journeys. Sometimes, we only need a word or phrase to bring them back with full force, like “the Holocaust” or “9/11.” Sometimes, it’s just the name of a city. Pittsburgh. El Paso.

For me, Pittsburgh now conjures up images of a deliberate slaughter of Jews in their synagogue because of their religion—which is also my religion. According to their attacker, it was also because they supported the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, which resettles refugees, including people from Africa, Eurasia, Latin America, and the Middle East.

Mourners after the killings at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, left, and the Walmart shooting in El Paso last year.

of Hate

What do anti-Semitism
and anti-immigrant
sentiments have in
common?

Plenty.



EACH OF THESE TRAGIC EVENTS IS PERSONAL FOR ME.

Similarly, El Paso reminds me of my grandmother. She was an immigrant who escaped her Jewish village after her left arm was badly burned—and forever scarred—during a Cossack attack. In El Paso, Hispanic immigrants were also deliberate targets, as another mass murderer went to Walmart.

Each of these tragic events is personal for me, and each is horrifying in its own right. But they are not isolated phenomena. The anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant sentiments on which they were built are intertwined.

Both reflect long-standing tribalism rooted in hate, and both are being exacerbated by rapid societal change, globalization, and emerging transnational networks proliferating white supremacist ideologies. These realities give us Pittsburgh, El Paso, Jersey City, Poway, and countless other mass murders—while exponentially metastasizing hate, the dehumanization of “others,” and violence.

Intertwined xenophobia

Anti-Semitism and xenophobia have existed throughout history and, most certainly, throughout the American experience. Grounded in dehumanizing stereotypes and malicious conspiracy theories, anti-Semitism operated alongside xenophobic mindsets that forced Jews into ghettos or sought to push them out of communities altogether, as the unwelcome stranger.

Similarly, immigrants to the U.S. and migrants worldwide have repeatedly been othered and ostracized, often prevented from freely following their faiths and being viewed as *lesser than* those in so-called civilized society. Consider the Irish who emigrated during the potato famine. As im-

surging with renewed force. Currently, Jews make up 2 percent of the U.S. population but are the targets of more than 50 percent of reported religiously motivated hate crimes. Likewise, immigrants are frequent victims of violent hate crimes including assault and robbery, though we do not fully know the breadth of this phenomenon. As this community is increasingly targeted, they're also becoming more frightened of reporting incidents to law enforcement for fear of consequences to their immigration status.

Deeply rooted and sometimes intertwined, anti-Semitism and anti-immigrant sentiments are now converging. Both Jews and immigrants are frequently stereotyped as sub-human and somehow alien. They are also racialized. White supremacists demonize Jews as racially distinct and are fixated on the skin color of foreign-born people in the U.S., the majority of whom come from Asia and South America.

The Big Lie and social media

Globalization is rapidly increasing our interconnectivity. The results include exponentially expanding hate groups, bigotry, and violence.

Thanks to air travel and advancements in technology, humans interact and communicate with an immediacy never possible before. As we increasingly connect beyond our home communities, and as escalating migration worldwide creates demographic shifts—with nearly 1 person in every 30 now living outside their native-born country—we encounter more and more people who are different from us. These revolutionary changes enhance lives, but they also facilitate the spread of stereotypes rooted in fear, such as blaming societal ills on Jews and immigrants.

stereotypes, and twisted ethical norms. They also tailor their campaigns to match the grievances of different communities and become trusted voices.

These modern tactics are updating a propaganda technique articulated by Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, when he charged Jews with using the Big Lie—a lie so big that no one would believe it could be anything but the truth. Hitler then employed that very tactic. After blaming the Jews for abusively using a Big Lie by claiming to be a religion, he then attacked Jews as a race to be feared and mistrusted.

Our understanding of the Big Lie has grown since *Mein Kampf* was published in 1925. It is often used in the context of a full-blown campaign that includes an element of truth or reflects on a fear with which the listener identifies. It is then promulgated by frequent repetition. The result is that it comes to be believed and to be viewed not only as reality but also as the truth.

These days, white supremacist messages, coupled with the proliferation of fake news, deliberate disinformation campaigns—including by governments—and the groundswell of social media, are having significant and damaging impact. “Truth” is now considered relative. And the Big Lies of the white supremacists are being repeated often enough to take hold.

Compelling research suggests that these strategies and efforts to mainstream anti-Semitic, anti-immigrant, and “otherizing” tropes can lay a groundwork for outright violence. A joint study by Princeton University and the University of Warwick in the U.K. identified a correlation between President Trump's negative tweets about Muslims, an increase in anti-Muslim public commentary, and a rise in hate crimes attacking members of that community.

migrant Catholics they faced violence and the emergence of anti-immigrant groups dedicated to “returning” the country to their homogeneous vision of the U.S.—such as the Order of the Star-Spangled Banner, which was committed to preserving a Protestant America. In a similar way that Jews have historically been labeled, the Irish were stereotyped as undesirable and dangerous. Today, we hear the same drumbeat, this time toward Muslims and other groups seeking to emigrate across borders, people who are called invaders and terrorists.

Though anti-Semitism and anti-immigrant fervor are not new, they are again

These attitudes are propagated through social media and the technological savvy of white supremacists and others from the so-called alt-right, who use modern communications tactics to transmit their worldviews. One such tactic is to repack-age core messages to sound “rational” for mainstream platforms (Twitter, YouTube, Facebook), so they get repeated and are internalized, even by people who do not identify with white supremacy. Some white supremacist messages are disguised as inside “jokes” and are designed to desensitize readers (including vulnerable children, teens, and young adults) to “othering,”

In addition, between 2012 and 2019, 1.5 million tweets in English, French, and German parroted the cry, “You [Jews] will not replace us.” It is difficult to imagine that this is unrelated to the violent 2017 white supremacist events in Charlottesville, when supremacists marched through the city's streets carrying torches and chanting menacingly, “Jews will not replace us.”

Such communications can have a powerful push-pull effect. With the mainstreaming of “othering” heightened by social media, more and more people are feeling alienated, ostracized, and alone. Though most of these individuals will not

be drawn into white supremacy or extremist ideologies, some are pushed toward it. Feeling vulnerable and isolated, they become more susceptible to the pull from extremist groups that promise a new home, a community of like-minded friends, and a place where their anger has an outlet.

A network of mass murder

Across the globe, there are growing extremist movements built on the conviction that people identified as white are superior and, because of demographic changes and a conspiracy to eliminate the whites, they are at risk. This energizes fear of the other, defined by their contrast to whiteness.

These fears go back centuries. With the emergence of the slave trade came attempts to provide a societal justification for the trade. It was argued that black people and others perceived to be people of color were “lesser” than those who are white. Over time, these convictions have been remodeled into ideological doctrines protecting whiteness and often identifying brown immigrants, Jews, and others as a threat.

One such ideology is now called the “Great Replacement” theory. From its French beginnings, the ideology has roots across Europe. Its premise is that superior white Europeans are being overrun by nonwhites, including Muslims, who are supplanting white Christian populations. Some of the theory’s proponents correlate it with another frightening thesis, that Jews are master conspirators who have a plan for worldwide domination and are doing so by racial mixing that will leave a uniform and racially ambiguous society.

A related ideology evolved in the U.S. and is now known as the “White Genocide” theory. The phrase has become shorthand for white supremacists who are spreading fear of

nonwhites (often immigrants and migrants) based on the conviction that these nonwhites threaten to start a war that will result in the genocide of “white civilization.” The theory also perpetrates stereotypes by blaming “shadowy groups” or the “New World Order” (well-known coded frameworks used to describe Jews) for creating this plot. White nationalists such as Richard Spencer envision a white ethno-state as a haven for white supremacists and those who sympathize with their concerns.

With the proliferation of online far-right radicalism, these conspiracy theories are communicated and reinforced as a cohesive message of fear and hate. Disseminated by

extremist networks from Europe to the U.S. to New Zealand, individuals adhering to these theories have become mass murderers, inspiring one another and leaving devastation in their wake.

The El Paso shooter left a manifesto that reflects the power of this messaging and mass murder modeling. He opened by describing his attack as “a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas” and then justified the murders as “simply defending [his] country from the cultural and ethnic replacement brought on by an invasion.” The El Paso shooter is not alone in looking for inspiration to other mass murderers. The Christchurch attacker in New Zealand who slaughtered Muslims at prayer cited white extremist attacks and terrorism in Norway, the U.S., Italy, Sweden, and the U.K.

In much the same manner, the Pittsburgh attacker recited white supremacist mantras targeting Jews but also expressing venom toward immigrants they sought to help. He wrote, “Open your eyes! It’s the filthy EVIL jews Bringing the Filthy EVIL Muslims into the Country!!” Similar to the Pittsburgh attacker, a shooter from Germany who attacked a synagogue on Yom Kippur wrote, “If I fail and die, but kill a single Jew, it was worth it. After all, if every White Man kills just one, we win.”

Finding a way out

Growing white supremacy worldviews are a threat. They fuel the fires of hate against Jews like me and immigrants like my grandmother. Their impact is personal and real, and it includes terrifying division and violence that extends far beyond these two identities—threatening far too many.

This reality is terrifying enough to immobilize us, but many people across the nation are paying attention. They are taking action and not remaining silent or becoming numbed by the onslaught of Big Lies.

Think of the interfaith activists who showed up at the southern border to condemn the dehumanizing treatment of immigrants and the assault on American morality. Or the thousands of Jews protesting ICE in the Never Again Action effort to stop authoritarian incarceration of immigrants.

People with such strong commitments to justice stand as an example for all of us. My personal inspiration and hope also comes from my unlikely friendships with two men who were once white supremacist activists. Arno Michaelis was a leader of the movement in Wisconsin. And TM Garret was a neo-Nazi in Germany.

Today, both are “formers” and have turned their backs on the movement they once served. Neither is still a hater, and both are living proof that white supremacy does not have to be a terminal. As part of Garret’s journey out of hate, he wanted to attend Yom Kippur services with Jews

last year. As he tells it, when he arrived, “they made me feel like family ... me with my past, with my background, praying in Hebrew and asking God for forgiveness ... it felt so good.”

Both Michaelis and Garret prove it is possible to find a way out. Equally moving, they are now committed to helping extremists find their paths out.

This is a moment for clarity, a moral compass guided by a vision of radical respect and inclusion. These men are role models showing a way forward. Now it is up to each of us to stand with them and to lead in our own right. ❖

Joyce Dubensky is CEO of the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, a nonprofit that works to combat religious bigotry and hate and to bridge differences. Tanenbaum staff member Dasha Tanner contributed research.

News. Commentary. Culture. Daily.



Start your day with Sojourners

SOJO.NET

LARYCIA HAWKINS' SOLIDARITY WITH MUSLIM WOMEN SHOWED THAT MANY EVANGELICALS WORSHIP 'A JESUS WHO IS ABOUT CULTURAL POWER.'



In theory, faculty with tenure have safety to pursue academic freedom, but four years ago Dr. Larycia Hawkins, then an associate professor of political science at Wheaton College, exposed the reality that for women of color tenure is vulnerable, even to online trolls. When Hawkins became the center of a national controversy over a Facebook post expressing solidarity with Muslim women during a wave of anti-Muslim rhetoric sweeping the nation, her employer did not protect her. Instead, it hung her out to dry. Now Hawkins is at the center again, this time as the subject of the documentary film *Same God*, directed by Wheaton alumna Linda Midgett.

Wheaton, an elite evangelical liberal arts school in the Chicago suburbs, touts a proud abolitionist past as a stop on the underground railroad and the first institution of higher education in Illinois to admit a black man. “Doc Hawk,” as Hawkins’ students lovingly call her, was celebrated as the first African American woman to receive tenure in the school’s 159-year history.

Documentary



Same God begins in the aftermath of the mass shooting on Dec. 2, 2015, in San Bernardino, by a Muslim couple influenced by Islamic extremism. Barack Obama was president and Donald Trump was on the campaign trail, promising a ban on all Muslims entering the country. Two days later, Jerry Falwell Jr. escalated tensions from a stage at Liberty University. “I’ve always thought if more good people had concealed carry permits, then we could end those Muslims before they walked in and killed us,” he said, after cavalierly asking the cheering audience if it was illegal to pull out the weapon he hinted was in his back pocket.

On the same day that *The Washington Post* published an open letter to evangelical leaders by students at Wheaton condemning Falwell Jr.’s comments, Hawkins also spoke her conscience in a Facebook post that quickly spun out of control. There, she announced that she would don a hijab during Advent, as an act she calls “embodied solidarity.” Her post began, “I stand in human solidarity with my Muslim neighbor because we are formed of the same primordial clay,” and cited the pope, who, earlier that week, had said that Muslims and Christians worship the “same God.” Within 48 hours, the evangelical community had erupted.

Absent of context, Hawkins was portrayed as a heretic by right-wing evangelicals, including Franklin Graham, son of Wheaton alumnus Billy Graham. “Can you believe this Wheaton College professor?” he said. “Shame on her!” In the rush to do what many institutions do in a PR crisis, Wheaton sought to protect its reputation with powerful donors. Hawkins was placed on administrative leave just before giving a final exam and asked to answer to the administration’s areas of concern. But the questioning of her commitment to the school’s statement of faith turned into an inquisition. In the end, she lost her job but gained a cloud of witnesses, including students and fellow faculty.

The near impossibility of having nuanced discussions about politics and religion on social media soon became clear. After showing for and against camps forming online among Wheaton alumni, Midgett dared to ask a

**“I STAND
IN HUMAN
SOLIDARITY
WITH MY
MUSLIM
NEIGHBOR
BECAUSE WE
ARE FORMED
OF THE SAME
PRIMORDIAL
CLAY.”**

tough question that is central to the film. She maintains that the film is not about Wheaton: “It’s a documentary about what is happening within evangelicalism. I was questioning if evangelicals even worship the same God.”

The re-centering of the narrative around Hawkins reveals not just what happened but also who she is, both spiritually and politically. The film takes the audience inside Hawkins’ childhood home in Oklahoma City. We meet her family and the church founded by her grandfather, which was vandalized with a racist slur three years ago.

Hawkins speaks about the inherently political nature of Christianity and life itself. Nevertheless, she had no idea that, in writing her Facebook post, which was called “innocuous” by Wheaton’s provost, as leaked emails later showed, she would be attacked by fellow Christians.

“Theoretical solidarity is not solidarity at all,” she says in the film about her reason for donning the hijab in support of Muslim women who are made vulnerable because they wear their religion on their heads. “Being with other people requires sacrificing our bodies.” During a post-screening Q&A at a college, Hawkins pushed students to see the privilege they had simply by attending college, regardless of whether they would go on to graduate.

Four years later, Midgett says of her central question, “I think I’m closer to saying, ‘No, we actually aren’t worshipping the same God. I think some evangelicals worship a God who was manifest in the Jesus who has brown skin and was poor and had a heart for the marginalized, and I think other evangelicals are worshipping a Jesus who is about power and who they view as a means of attaining and holding onto cultural power.’”

While many evangelicals have rejected the film—refusing to see it at all—those who have chosen to engage, including many Muslims and secular viewers, are having big conversations and making strides toward healing religious and sociopolitical divisions. ✨

Elan Young (@YoungElan) is a writer living in eastern Tennessee. She writes about the environment, arts and culture, disability, social justice, and engineering. *Same God* is airing on several PBS member stations (see samegodfilm.com/broadcasts).



On Screen

From *Parasite*

HIERARCHY

By Chris Karnadi

In Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite*, being upper class means loving Western culture—and its colonialism. Spatial metaphor structures the award-winning dark comedy from the Korean director. Families and living spaces are the primary characters and settings for the film. The poor Kim family lives in a cramped basement apartment, and the rich Park family live high up in the hills of Seoul.

(Warning: Spoilers)

In the first half of the movie, the Kims' son Ki-woo is hired as an English tutor for the Parks' daughter, and the Kims scheme to get each member of their family employed by the Parks. Their plot runs smoothly, and the Kims relax at the Parks' luxurious home while they are away. But the movie's clean narrative line drops when a third family and their living arrangement are revealed. The former housekeeper returns to expose a subterranean bomb shelter in the Parks' home where her husband has been living, unbeknownst to the Parks.

The former housekeeper and her husband sit even lower in the class hierarchy than the Kims by living completely below ground. And the Kims' desire to become wealthy leads them to murder the former housekeeper and trap her husband in the bunker.

Class, however, is not only represented by the families' living spaces, but also their investment in Western culture. The Parks love America. They praise American goods and encourage their son's obsession with Native Americans. He runs around in a headdress, shooting toy arrows, and loves a plastic teepee made in America.

This stereotyping and fetishization of Native culture by the young boy and his family represents how closely related the upper-class family's wealth and colonialism are.

And it's exactly the Parks' attraction to the West to which the Kims appeal. Ki-woo and his sister pose as American-educated, and therefore qualified, tutors for the Parks' children. It is this trust the Parks have in anything from America that sets up the Kim family's grand deception.

When I traveled to see my family in Indonesia last January, Ariana Grande's "7 Rings" had just released, and I heard Grande chant, "I want it, I got it," over and over on the radio as we inched through the crowded streets of Bandung. American consumeristic culture is attractive to many across the globe and educates countries in capitalism and colonialism.

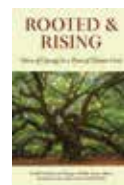
But this attraction doesn't just go one way. In the U.S., access to "exotic" cultures, like those of East Asia, can be considered desirable. After all, Grande got a kanji tattoo that she thought said "7 Rings." What it really said? "Small barbecue grill." ❀

Chris Karnadi is an assistant editor of Duke Divinity's *Faith and Leadership*.

New & Noteworthy

'OUR HELP IS IN THE NAME'

Canada-based The Forest Archive drops a worship album celebrating the Songs of Ascents in Psalms 120 to 134. Mixing strings and percussion with energy and earthiness, *A Garden Green* is folk music that invites listeners to a deeper story of unfettered joy and resistance to injustice. theforestarchive.bandcamp.com



Power and Love

In *Rooted and Rising: Voices of Courage in a Time of Climate Crisis*, 21 leaders offer their wisdom about the spiritual practice of climate activism. Countering a narrative of despair, *Rooted and Rising* has the potential to lead readers into meaningful action.

Rowman & Littlefield



Called to Freedom

Women in the book of Exodus found many creative ways to seek justice and defy empire. Kelley Nikondeha's *Defiant: What the Women of Exodus Teach Us about Freedom* encourages readers to reflect on an ancient story of liberation and explore how we might be liberators in our own time.

Eerdman's

BOYCOTT FACEBOOK?

By
Danny Duncan
Collum



Eyes & Ears

By now the sins of Facebook, as a social media platform and megacorporation, are well-known. You've got invasions of privacy, data breaches, viral falsehoods, livestreamed rapes and murders, and the list goes on.

Well, a few months ago, the volunteer technology committee at the Catholic parish where my wife, Polly, works as social responsibility minister did something about it. They asked their parish council to consider taking the congregation off Facebook entirely and no longer using the platform as a medium of communication. When Polly told me about this, I was a little surprised. Maybe I missed something, but, amid the sporadic calls to "Delete Facebook" in the wake of the company's various scandals, I hadn't heard of a religious community actually implementing a boycott.

Once you think about it, the arguments for boycotting Facebook are pretty obvious. When we lend our eyeballs to that platform, we bring it advertising dollars, helping to fund its corrupt and dangerous practices. And what's worse, the company's business model makes every person or organization with a Facebook page a recruiter for the company and turns every posted detail of our lives into a product (consumer data) that the company can sell to commercial and political advertisers. When a congregation encourages parishioners to log onto a church Facebook page and share what they find there with interested friends, the church places its members and friends at risk of having personal information exposed to bad actors. In addition, when a church recruits members

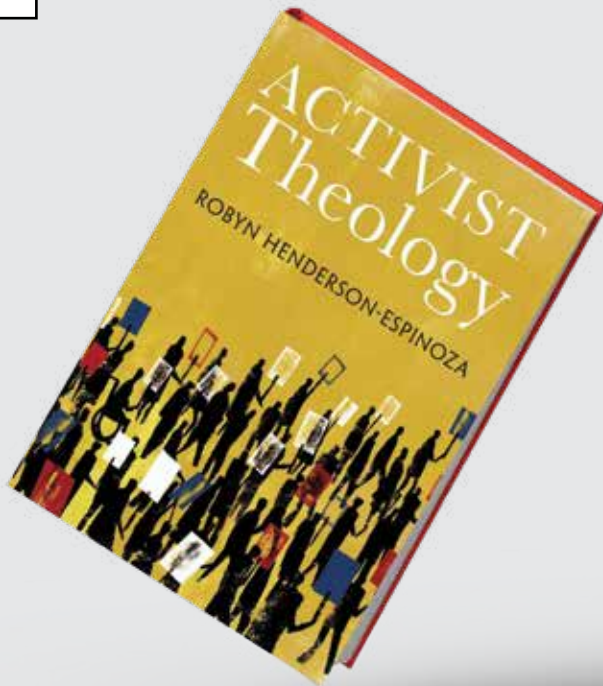
and friends onto Facebook, it brings those loved ones into a media environment rife with campaigns of mass deception that the company willfully refuses to weed out.

Given all that, why would any ethical, socially responsible organization such as your church (or this magazine) continue to make Facebook a part of its outreach strategy? Well, that's pretty self-evident, too: Facebook is where almost everyone is. Seventy percent of U.S. adults use Facebook, so the platform has effectively made itself the public square. Facebook is that worst possible spawn of the capitalist system—an unregulated monopoly. Even people who think they aren't on Facebook actually are, because they're on Instagram or WhatsApp, potential competitors that Facebook bought out years ago.

So if we're not going to just talk to ourselves, we need to be on Facebook, this argument goes. After all, didn't Jesus risk guilt-by-association when he went home with the Roman collaborator and extortioner, Zacchaeus, and publicly dined with other notorious and unclean sinners?

So there's the Facebook dilemma that confronts any religious congregation. Do you collaborate with manifest evil, or do you risk isolation and irrelevance? As I write, my wife's parish is still discussing the issue. Maybe yours should too. ✕

Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel *White Boy*.



**OPPRESSIVE SYSTEMS OF POWER
DO NOT FALL BY THE SWORD BUT
THROUGH RADICAL ACTS OF LOVE
AND COMPASSION.**

mujerista, and liberation and black liberation theologies. Activist theology is an extension of these existing branches that center the marginalized. But instead of simply fighting theory with more theory, it prioritizes actions that resist and challenge the supremacist systems of oppression.

Although Henderson-Espinoza's past spans work in universities and "on the ground," as a self-described intellectual activist, their voice more comfortably fits the former. But they break from the abstract through poignant, relevant examples—such as the deaths of Trayvon Martin and Mike Brown, and the resulting Black Lives Matter movement—to show how disruptions to the status quo happen and how to look for and act on them. They also make use of their personal history as a queer Latinx individual who grew up in Texas as the child of a Mexican immigrant mother and a white father. Such stories are crucial to activist theology, which ultimately draws power from a disruptive love.

This, to me, is the real

strength of the foundation Henderson-Espinoza has laid out. Following the example of Jesus, oppressive systems of power do not fall by the sword but through radical acts of love and compassion. The author writes:

"What if learning to love ourselves and the center of our difference actually revolutionizes today's work of learning to become human with one another? ... What if disruption created conditions of possibility for another world to materialize not through transactional relating but through the deep work of awakening from our shared inhumanity?"

Through such questions, the book is a call to action, to ask the right *what-ifs* and live out the answers. ✦

Jera Brown writes about the intersection of their faith and sexuality at scarletchurch.com and edits the blog and anthology project sacredandsubversive.net.

'TIP THE TOP'

Activist Theology,
by Robyn Henderson-Espinoza

Fortress Press

Historically, theology has worked a lot like Reaganomics. Those with access to academic ivory towers get to theorize about God and spiritual meaning. Often, watered-down versions of these theories reach the rest of the population through pastoral care professionals and the few thinkers and writers who strive to make theology accessible.

One of the primary goals of activist theology, described by theologian Robyn Henderson-Espinoza in their new book *Activist Theology*, is to reverse this flow of meaning-making. The work of activist theology "is to invest in community, so that knowledge production is not top down from the academy but begins on the ground to move to the middle and tip the top."

What does it mean to "tip the top?" Ideally, a revolution.

This starts with recognition of how social and political systems of oppression are supported by what the author calls "theologies of white supremacy" and Christian supremacy. There is a long history of theological systems that have exposed these issues, such as queer, womanist,



WHAT WE WANT TO SEE

"Fairview,"
by Jackie Sibbles Drury

A

At the end of Jackie Sibbles Drury's landmark drama "Fairview," the audience faces a deep and enduring question: "Are we able to look through another's eyes? Or are we merely reflecting on what we're willing, what we want to see?" To bring us to the point where we're able to make this query, Drury takes us on a ride through a landscape of African American theatrical tropes, sometimes familiar and sometimes unsettling, so that we are better able to face ourselves, as discomfiting as that is.

The beginning seems fairly rote, as a family gets ready for a birthday party in an immaculately white living room. We could be in the home of the Huxtables, chuckling along with the laugh track. Beverly, the perfectionist mother

who wishes for everything to be just right for Grandma's celebration, hovers over all, brushing on the finishing touches.

But, if you look and listen closely, there are cracks that begin to show: the odd wavering of the soundtrack and teenage daughter Keisha turning to address the audience in a moment of Brechtian shock. Then we find that we are not seeing TV-perfect domestic bliss. Keisha comments on the beautiful perfection and longing for her bright future, standing at its threshold, just waiting to seize the day. And then she thinks aloud, "Something, yes, something is keeping me from what I could be. And that something. It thinks that it has made me who I am."

As these words of warning hang in the air, Drury has many more theatrical tricks in store. This is no American comedy classic that will resolve itself in three acts: This play is one of the most reflexive and biting commentaries on the state of race politics in the U.S. to date. Watching with pleasure is no longer allowed. We are asked to take part in the conversation, not as judge or jury, but as the new object of study.

Broadway audiences are largely white, and, according to the Asian American Performers Action Coalition's study released last year, 86.8 percent of Broadway and off-Broadway plays produced in the 2016-17 season were written by white playwrights, 87.1 percent of the season's directors were white, and only 33 percent of roles that season went to nonwhite actors. In the final moments of "Fairview," when we are asked to confront ourselves and why we like certain stories and images as opposed to others, we realize there is no such thing as fairness in the American theater.

"Fairview" is playing in 2020 at more than 50 regional theaters across the U.S. See it when you are able, and enter into its fairer view. ✦

MaYaa Boateng starred in the New York production of "Fairview."

Stephanie Sandberg is an assistant professor of theater and film studies at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Va.

HER RIGHTS

An excerpt from
A Black Women's History
of the United States,
by Daina Ramey Berry
and Kali Nicole Gross

Beacon Press

In early January 1600, Isabel de Olvera, a woman of African descent, petitioned the mayor of Querétaro, Mexico, for protection of her rights before joining Juan de Oñate's expedition to New Spain, which consisted of several regions in North and South America, including present-day New Mexico, Arizona, and Florida. As she was about to embark on the journey with Spanish explorers, Olvera believed she would be vulnerable to violence or captivity. "I am going on the expedition," she stated in her deposition, "and have reason to fear that I may be annoyed by some individual since I am a mulatto."

Born the daughter of Hernando, an African man, and Magdalena, an Indian woman, she had always been free. Yet Olvera knew that those she encountered would deem her property, and she wanted the protection of "an affidavit" that she proudly noted would confirm she was "free and not bound by marriage or slavery." Her intent was to carry "a properly certified and signed copy" of this document to show anyone who might question her status. Her appeal ended with a final declaration: "I demand justice."

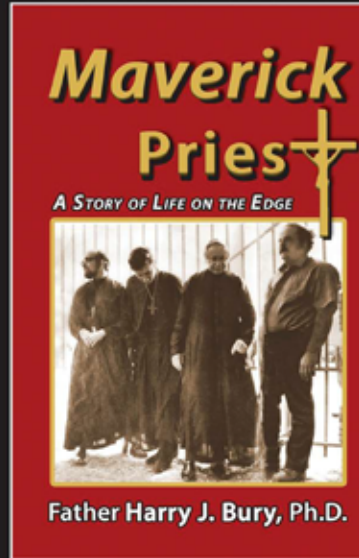
Women of African descent arrived in what became the United States as early as the sixteenth century. Their histories on this land are difficult to document because the archive hardly recognizes their presence. When they do appear, many are nameless figures, mentioned in passing, with little identifying information given about their experiences. We begin this study before the formation of the country as we know it today, at a time when rare women of African descent, like Isabel de Olvera, demanded justice. Ironically, even in this period, from 1400 to 1619, Black women were fighting for their rights, for their sense of belonging. ❖

Reprinted with permission from Beacon Press.



**BLACK
WOMEN'S
HISTORIES ARE
DIFFICULT TO
DOCUMENT
BECAUSE THE
ARCHIVE
HARDLY
RECOGNIZES
THEIR
PRESENCE.**

THE STRUGGLE FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE IN OUR VIOLENT WORLD



Father Harry J. Bury is a Catholic priest unlike any you have ever met.

- Arrested at the Pentagon.
- Chained to the gates of the American Embassy in Saigon.
- Served at the side of Mother Teresa in Calcutta.
- Participated in the release of American POWs in Vietnam.
- Kidnapped at gunpoint in Gaza.

AVAILABLE AT ALL MAJOR
RETAILERS AND ONLINE

RDRPUBLISHERS.COM



Do you
❤ books?

Subscribe to
INSCRIBED,
Sojourners' new
(free) email
newsletter
focused on books
and culture
sojo.net/books

SOJOURNERS



CONNECT THE DOTS

By Kim Stafford



A veteran slumped in a midnight
doorway was trained to kill, so killed,
and killing banished sleep.

A hurt child, now thirty-two, who
never had the food he needed, haunted
by his father's blows, shoots meth.

A mother abused as a girl, can't
speak of it, shuns touch, can't trust
any boy her own girl brings home.

A nation, founded by the shot heard
round the world, prevailing at Hiroshima,
can't understand our daily massacres

as if a gun were not a war in small,
strife undeclared but flaring sudden,
as one thing becomes another.

A life? Kind words and gentle gestures?
Planting seeds and seeking peace?
Where could that lead?

Kim Stafford is the poet laureate of Oregon. His most recent book is *Wild Honey, Tough Salt* (Red Hen Press).

Standing up for justice.



Sandy Ovalle, Sojourners' Director of Campaigns and Organizing, leads a rally for immigrant rights.

SojoAction is a Sojourners community dedicated to putting our faith in action for social justice. Through curated conversations, online resources, and in-person gatherings, SojoAction provides the tools and training needed to activate communities and nourish the movement.

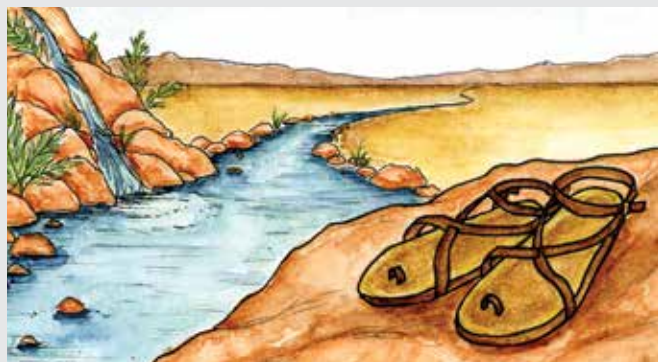
Learn more at sojo.net/sojoaction.

SOJOURNERS
SojoAction

THIRSTY LAND, THIRSTY PEOPLE

Scripture passages
are from the Revised
Common Lectionary,
Cycle A.

By Reta Halteman Finger



Living the Word

On the church calendar, the entire month of March is devoted to Lent—a period of self-examination as we follow

Jesus on his journey to Jerusalem to confront the powers who have usurped Yahweh's temple for their own purposes. Examining our own motives and desires, our private resentments and need for control, is one of the hardest tasks we can ever do. But there is no better time than Lent to deal with our own egos as honestly as possible. Time and time again I hear of family members or friends who are estranged from each other over money matters or misunderstandings. It reminds me of C.S. Lewis' story *The Great Divorce*, when various characters would rather take the bus back to hell than reconcile with a brother or sister.

Besides interpersonal relationships, there are societal sins in which we participate. What is our responsibility to the community in which we live? What policies would best help the homeless or relieve unnecessary cruelty in the criminal justice system? How much should we change our lifestyles because of impending climate change? How does love of money and power affect our relationship with Jesus who laid them aside to identify with "the least of these"? Our lectionary readings for this Lenten period of self-examination range across both testaments and different genres of literature. References to sin and law are prominent—but so are the antidotes: confession, repentance, forgiveness, and grace.

Reta Halteman Finger, author of *Creating a Scene in Corinth*, is a New Testament scholar and a *Sojourners* contributing editor. Read more of her Bible studies at eewc.com/Retas-Reflections.

THERE IS NO BETTER TIME THAN LENT TO DEAL WITH OUR OWN EGOS.

MARCH 1

REPENTANCE IS HARD

GENESIS 2:15-17; 3:1-7; PSALM 32;
ROMANS 5:12-19; MATTHEW 4:1-11

Temptation, sin, confession, repentance, and forgiveness—or resisting temptation from the start? For those who engage Lent as a time of self-examination, these readings provide two examples, one from each testament. Psalm 32, attributed to King David, most likely refers to his own sins of adultery and murder. But after David repented and experienced forgiveness, he was able to eloquently express both the misery of the conviction of sin, and the rush of relief and wild joy that accompanied confession and repentance. You would think people would try repenting more often.

In Matthew 4:1-11, we learn that even the most intense temptations were resisted by Jesus, the "Son of David." In the wilderness, Jesus confronted the voices within. "Use your power for yourself!" the tempter urged. "Change these stones into bread—like Yahweh made manna in the desert!" "Show your power to those big shots in Jerusalem! Then come up the mountain, and I will show you all the kingdoms of the world. They can all be yours ... if you worship me." Don't think the human Son of David did not struggle hard against these thoughts. At that very moment, Roman soldiers were occupying his land. What aspiring king, president, or politician could have turned down such an offer?

Truly repenting of sin is hard. Resisting temptation is hard. When have you repented of a sinful act and found forgiveness? When have you found the support—of friends or angels—to resist temptation?

MARCH 8

SINGING MIGRANT SONGS

GENESIS 12:1-4; PSALM 121;
ROMANS 4:1-5, 13-17; JOHN 3:1-17

Sometimes a brief text like Genesis 12:1-4 cries out for a larger literary context. Before Yahweh calls Abram to migrate, Abram's father Terah has already moved the extended family from "Ur of the Chaldeans" to Haran in northern Mesopotamia. Perhaps with such an extravagant promise of national greatness (verse 2) to a childless couple, the second move was easier.

The following paragraph (12:5-9) depicts Abram's entire household gradually migrating south through the land of Canaan, building altars to Yahweh at sacred

sites they encounter. We must imagine a small crowd constantly making and breaking camp, pitching and collapsing tents carried by donkeys, searching for food and water for livestock, watching for hostile locals. And walking, walking, walking ... on dusty, stony paths with calloused feet bereft of Nikes. The paragraph ends with Abram setting “out toward the arid southern plain, making and breaking camp as he went” (12:9).

The founders of the Jewish people were migrants following a promise far vaguer than the hopes of current migrants and refugees fleeing famine and violence in search of better lives in Europe or America. But even as Lady Liberty lifts her torch to welcome immigrants to America after walking many miles, they meet border walls, an ICE-y greeting, and detention camps where families are separated.

Psalms 121 is a song of pilgrimage. “The Lord will protect you on your journeys, whether going or coming” (verse 8). How can the people of Yahweh—migrant or local—fulfill God’s promises today?

MARCH 15

ON THE JESUS TRAIL

EXODUS 17:1-7; PSALM 95;
ROMANS 5:1-11; JOHN 4:5-42

Our Lenten self-examination should include reflecting on our capacity for compassion. How deeply can we share in the lives and suffering of others? In Exodus 17:1-7, the Israelites are walking through a desert and complaining to Moses that they are dying of thirst. “Is Yahweh with us or not?” they ask. After conferring with Yahweh, Moses takes his miracle rod and strikes the rock for abundant water.

Although this text criticizes the Israelites for arguing with and testing God, I cringed at a much harsher account of this event in Psalm 95. “For forty years I despised that generation!” rants Yahweh. “These people have twisted hearts!” (verse 10). Where’s the compassion?

Last April I walked the 65-kilometer “Jesus Trail” in the Galilee region of northern Israel. On the first day, between Nazareth and Cana, I nearly collapsed from dehydration. My partner made me rest and drink lots of water before we continued. Since that physically demanding hike, I now can identify with Israelites

in the desert, as well as with Jesus and his disciples traveling everywhere on foot (without water bottles?).

When Jesus stopped by Jacob’s well at noon and asked a Samaritan woman for a drink (John 4:5-42), he was probably as exhausted and dehydrated as I was. I doubt his first thought was about class, gender, or theology. Water from that well enabled Jesus to engage this woman in a profound reflection on living water.

Use these Lenten texts to examine your own ability to empathize with others.

MARCH 22

A HUMOROUS BREAK

1 SAMUEL 16:1-13; PSALM 23;
EPHESIANS 5:8-14; JOHN 9:1-41

The stories of Samuel anointing David and Jesus’ healing of the blind man can serve two purposes. They provide a humorous break in our serious Lenten self-examination—as well as a reminder to comfortable Christians that “the last will be first, and the first will be last” (Matthew 20:16).

In 1 Samuel, the prophet’s expectations of who should succeed Saul as king were all wrong. Yahweh chooses that grubby teenager hanging out with his family’s flocks and thinking about how to compose Psalm 23!

Following this theme, the blind man healed by Jesus proves to be the most self-assured and witty character in John’s gospel! As a beggar, he is a drag on the local economy. Worse, the townspeople and even the disciples view his disability as evidence of sin (9:2). The process of healing takes several steps of “blind faith,” but the man returns from washing mud off his eyes, not knowing who healed him but ecstatic that he can now see. Then begins an intricate dance of reversals between those who are blind and those who can see. Read the six scenes from John 9:8-41. The detective work of the Pharisees proceeds with increasing humor as they keep losing the

debate. “I already told you,” says the man to the Pharisees, “and you didn’t listen! Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?” (verse 27). Don’t miss Jesus’ clever retort to the Pharisees (verse 41).

MARCH 29

SIBLING DISCIPLESHIP

EZEKIEL 37:1-14; PSALM 130;
ROMANS 8:6-11; JOHN 11:1-45

In 597 B.C.E., the prophet Ezekiel was deported to Babylon in the first wave of Jewish exiles. The vision of scattered bones coming alive became a metaphor encouraging the scattered Israelites to rise again as the people of Yahweh. Perhaps, we are familiar with James Weldon Johnson’s version of “Dem Dry Bones,” a song that gave hope to enslaved Christians and their descendants in the American South.

Ezekiel 37 is often read in connection with Jesus’ raising of Lazarus in John 11. Yet the latter is not written as metaphor, but as an integral part of the plot leading to Jesus’ historical death and resurrection. Deep emotion and irony pervade this long narrative dominated by Martha and Mary. Only Jesus’ most intimate disciples dare reproach him for not getting there in time to save their brother (verses 21, 32). In this gospel, Martha, not Peter, first names him “Messiah” (verse 27).

But if this dramatic miracle is historical, why do the synoptic gospels omit it? New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham suggests a political reason. The Jewish temple leaders also wish to kill Lazarus (John 12:9-11) because of their hatred of Jesus, so Mark, the earliest gospel, omits the story for his safety. Using Mark, Matthew and Luke also omit it. Written years later, after that generation has died, John’s gospel can freely portray how Lazarus became a harbinger of Jesus’ own bodily resurrection.

For self-examination: Ponder the mutual love between Jesus and these siblings (Martha, Mary, and Lazarus). How intimate is your relationship with the risen Jesus? ♦

**FORGIVENESS IS
ACCOMPANIED BY A RUSH
OF RELIEF AND WILD JOY.**

“Preaching the Word,” Sojourners’ online resource for Bible study and sermon preparation, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

H'rumps



WHAT DOES A COOKIE SAY ABOUT YOU?

By Ed Spivey Jr.

I'm sleeping more soundly now that Jared Kushner has solved the intractable Israel-Palestine conflict and, for his next big project, is taking on the troublesome border wall. With his track record of success, we'll soon see the long-promised barrier protecting our nation from nefarious foreign agents with malevolent intent.

But *enough* about Rudy Giuliani. I got my own problem: It's Girl Scout cookie season.

When the two girls knocked on our front door, I was immediately thrown into my annual agony of temptation. I'm a big fan of the Girl Scouts and their molding of young minds and hearts, but I try to avoid simple sugars and white flour. Girl Scout cookies, while delicious, contain few beneficial nutrients. There are no ancient grains, no organic fruits, no locally grown vegetables (a cookie named "Cauliflower Cremes" wouldn't stand a chance), nor any of the spices now known to benefit healthy longevity. I'd buy a box of "Turmeric 'n' Cumin Samoas," but I doubt anyone else would.

So I grudgingly ordered my usual: Two boxes of Thin Mints and a box of Do-Si-Dos. I do this to support an institution I admire, but also to continue an ongoing ontological study of human behavior and my theory that there are only two kinds of people in the world: Thin Mint People and Do-Si-Do Folk.

I set both cookies out for guests, then watch as they unconsciously reveal their personal character traits—for better or worse—by the choices they make.

This test, though unscientific because of the small sample size, continues to inform. Thin Mint People are polite as guests,

**GET THEE BEHIND ME, SATAN.
I MEAN ... GIRL SCOUTS.**

removing the sweet round discs one at a time, holding their end of a pleasant conversation. But their eyes never waver from the plate. They keep track of the remaining number, mentally calculating when to take a second, then a third, wondering if removing two at a time would be impolite, or noticed. I have no doubt that, when left alone with a box, Thin Mint People remove an entire sleeve and carry it around the house, eating their way to the bottom in rapid succession.

Thus, my observations suggest, Thin Mint People are impetuous and self-gratifying, prone to rash decision-making, undependable in times of conflict, and easily distracted in times of peace. Their fingers still sticky with chocolate, the inevitable regret they express is unconvincing, a thin veil that does not conceal a desire for "just two more."

Do-Si-Do Folk, on the other hand, are judicious, calm, and forward-thinking. Because their favorite cookie is made with peanut butter, just one will satisfy them until dinner. To eat more would be excessive, and clearly indicative of poor judgment and bad manners. Do-Si-Do Folks are model citizens, dependable and forward-thinking, the kind of people who could be trusted to lead our most important institutions, such as the Girl Scouts.

But it turned out the people at the door weren't Girl Scouts. They were Mormons. And they didn't have any cookies. Not that they weren't willing to speak on that subject, and many others, at length, if I'd just let them into my home. But I was in no mood for theological wrangling about atonement. I wanted cookies. In my mind, triggered by the hope of forthcoming baked goods, the glass of milk was already poured and the dessert plate readied.

Not that I'd need a plate, of course. I eat them right out of the sleeve. Because I'm a Thin Mint Guy. (But you knew that already, didn't you?)

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of *Sojourners* magazine.

**"Preaching the Word is my main reference
for thinking about my sermon for the week."**

—Rev. Dr. Diane Mowrey



USE THE BEST social justice-focused resource for
preaching the gospel, curated by the editors of
Sojourners magazine.

Access Preaching the Word through any web browser
or our iPhone app.

Visit sojo.net/ptw to start today and save 30%
with our limited-time special.

**PREACHING
THE WORD**

A RESOURCE BY
SOJOURNERS



CALLED. EQUIPPED. SENT.



At North Park Theological Seminary, a commitment to transformative justice and spiritual formation meet.

- ▶ Located in one of the most diverse zip codes in the country, North Park's Chicago campus is enriched by having the world at our doorstep.
- ▶ North Park provides a holistic theological education that is affordable and accessible, with on-campus, online and hybrid offerings.
- ▶ Through the School of Restorative Arts housed at Stateville Correctional Center, North Park is the only seminary that offers a blended classroom where free and incarcerated students study side by side.

“A North Park education forms the whole person, equipping graduates to lead restorative ministries that transform communities through the power of the Holy Spirit.”

- REV. DR. DAVID KERSTEN
DEAN OF THE SEMINARY AND VICE PRESIDENT FOR CHURCH RELATIONS

Enroll Now

www.northpark.edu/seminary

- ▶ MDiv or MATS
- ▶ MA in Christian Formation or Christian Ministry
- ▶ DMin in Preaching or Urban Ministry Leadership
- ▶ Add an MBA or MNA to your seminary degree
- ▶ Certificates in Transformative Justice, Intercultural Ministry, Faith and Health, and more!

Contact Us

(773) 244-6229 or (800) 964-0101
semadmissions@northpark.edu



NORTH PARK
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY